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**The Theory of Social Movements and
the British Labour Movement, circa 1790-1920**

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Summary

The following study aims to apply concepts drawn from the sociology of social movements to the history of the labour movement in Britain, from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. It proceeds from a definition of the social movement as a logic of action, which tends to overcome domination, by envisaging an alternative project for society. The key features of the logic of social movement are its principles of 'identity', 'opposition' and 'totality', which develop co-jointly and coherently. This logic can only be retrieved analytically, since it is argued that collective action is complex, and also contains a different logic, tending towards the pursuit of interests, which as such does not criticise social power in general terms. These concepts are applied to labour action and discussed through a comparison with pluralist and Marxist approaches in the sociology of the labour movement. Both perspectives are criticised for the dichotomy that they impose between social antagonism and institutional action. However, the proposed definition of social movements is indebted to Marx's insight that social conflict cannot be reabsorbed by collective bargaining procedures and parliamentary politics; and to the pluralist argument that the openness of the political system conditions the debate, within the labour movement, about the possibility of a reformist path of political action. Labour action in Britain is investigated in relation to the development of two popular movements: the first emerged in the late eighteenth century and culminated with Chartism; the second started with the unionisation of the unskilled in the late 1880s and was consolidated in the early decades of the new century. Utilising the material provided by historiography, the inquiry reconstructs the diachronic formation of the different components, developing either in civil society or in the political system, of the two movements. The exposition alternates between narrative and analysis of the links between the logic of the social movement within labour action and processes of self-organisation, the articulation of critical discourses and the integration of popular strata in both movements.

INTRODUCTION

How to analyse empirical phenomena such as collective movements, popular mobilisations and events or waves of protests? Is the notion of social movement that has emerged in post-W.W.II sociology as tool for the analysis of these phenomena, useful if not essential? And how should it be conceptualised in the context of the competing theoretical perspectives and research programmes that are available in the debate?

In this study I suggest a definition of social movement as a logic of action which constructs an antagonistic conflict against opponents defined within civil society. In the prevailing position within the sociological debate social movements are identified with the use of disruptive or non-institutional tactics and are deemed to be created by social groups which find themselves excluded from the political system. I employ the notion of civil society in order to counteract this theoretical choice of seeking the structural conditions for the emergence of social movements in the dynamics of the political system. It will be argued that the emergence of a logic of social movement within collective action is to be explained through recognising the reality of social relations of domination within civil society. But this is only the structural conditioning because, of course, collective action implies the active power of people in both resisting domination and pursuing their own interests.

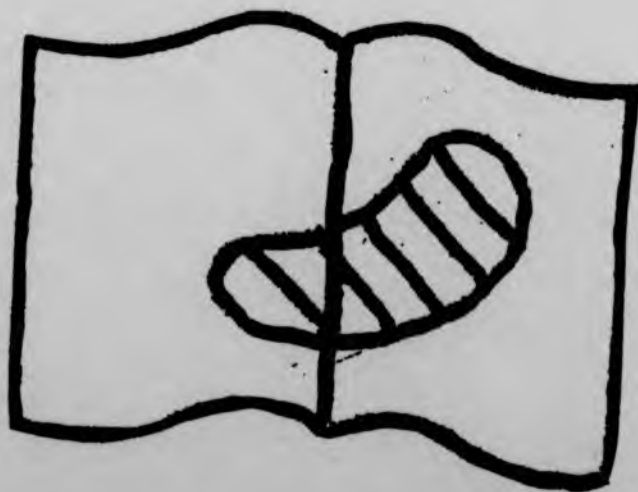
A logic of the social movement emerges and is sustained when collective action contains a component of general critique of the social order and tends to its overcoming. I try to retrieve this logic within the collective action of artisans and factory workers in Britain during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The logic of social movement will be seen as one analytical component within the complexity of labour action. Indeed a logic of interests can be found as well in the collective action of working people. Structurally conditioned by relations of competition in civil society, the logic of interests denotes that component of collective action which aims to preserve or increase the resources available for individuals and groups.

The interesting characteristic of the logic of social movement is that it causes labour action to structure a conflict against social opponents (in this case merchant and industrial capitalists) which contains elements that are non-negotiable, namely that cannot be entirely reabsorbed by institutional procedures, either in civil society or at the political level. (This occurs independently from the use of disruptive tactics and from the exclusion of working people from the political system.) A further difference that the actuality of the logic of social movement makes is to foster, more strongly than the logic of interests, integrative dynamics in the collective action of working people and popular strata. Moreover, the logic of social movement can explain processes of ideational autonomy and independent self-organisation among popular strata which might also have consequences in terms of changes in the political system.

These processes will be reconstructed when the action of the labour movement in Britain is investigated. The exposition consists in a narrative of labour action in the wider context of popular politics from about 1790 to about 1920. Historical evidence and some historiographical debates will be read through the analytical concepts that have just been defined and others which are drawn from the sociology of social movements. The relationship, within labour action, between the logic of interests and the possible actuality of the logic of social movement is analysed, together with the latter's consequences in terms of the construction of autonomous popular movements. Britain has been chosen, on the one hand, because of the rich historiographical production on her labour movement. This has thoroughly investigated the processes of formation of labour action in the different sectors, localities and historical moments. It has also engaged in a rich debate in terms of interpretations and explanations where the reference to controversies in social theory may render possible a fruitful interchange with the theory of social movements. On the other hand British labour movement, unlike its main Continental counterparts, shows a stronger prominence of its articulation at the level of civil society - relatively to the political party - and looks most promising for a study of work relations and labour self-organisation originating in them.

Chapter One contains a critique of what I dub as the sociology of protest, namely the tradition of study on social movements inaugurated in the United States since the 1950s, including the collective behavior approach, the resource mobilization theory

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and the political process model. These theoretical perspectives are criticised on two grounds: 1) the equation that they posit between social movements and the occurrence of protest, and the consequent attempts to explain the latter as empirical regularity in relation to various so-called independent factors; 2) their dependence on a pluralist framework, which sees modern politics as reduced to the politics of interests. Consequently, the sociology of protest constructs social movements as those phenomena, such as events (and waves) of protest or engaged-in-protest corporate groups, which are empirically recognisable because they are distinct from the politics conducted through institutional channels. As opposed to that, it is anticipated in Chapter One that the social movement should rather be conceptualised as a logic of action which coexists with a logic of interests in the actual action of some corporate groups and in some waves of protest.

In Chapter Two the critique of pluralist sociology of social movements is carried forward with particular reference to its interpretations of Western labour movements. At the same time, the analytical construction of social movement as a logic of antagonistic action is attempted. Its structural conditioning is retraced in Marx's arguments of the emergence of a civil society in the Western world, and of the reality of relations of domination in the workplaces, as distinct from relations of political authority and power.

Pluralist interpretations of the Western labour movement make explicit the theoretical premiss which belongs to the sociology of protest as well, and underpins its definition

of social movements. If, according to Pizzorno, pluralist arrangements are stable to the extent that they allow the representation of interests issued from civil society, social movements are discontinuous cycles of protest, times when workers put forward non-negotiable claims and deny legitimacy to the social and political order. As pluralist scholars neglect the structural conditioning of social domination, they unduly subsume the retracing of social antagonism, as analytical component within labour action, under the research question of the conditions for the emergence and decline of workers' waves of protest or political radicalism.

The hypothesis that I want to explore in the empirical part of my work, is the possibility and fruitfulness to analytically distinguish between the dynamics at the levels of civil society and of the political system. In the former the possible presence of a logic of social movement might be traced in the action and discourse of working people, whereas in the latter the labour movement is faced with the dilemma of reformism or radicalism. At this second level I borrow the pluralist hypothesis that the degree of openness of the political system is crucial of for the outcome.

The reality of relations of domination in civil society allows one to highlight the dynamics of resistance by working people and their action in attempting to control the organisation of work; processes which cannot be reduced neither to the production of events of protest or to political radicalism. Britain is chosen as empirical object of study, given that some labour and social historians stress this tradition of persistent autonomous activity by workers at the micro-level of the workplace.

The encounter with the work of E.P. Thompson, in order to understand the debate on class in historiography, has stimulated me to confront labour action in the Britain of the early nineteenth century. In Chapter Three I utilise the historiographical work on the action of the artisans and the self-organisation of popular strata in general, which culminate in the Chartist decade. The reliance on Thompson's scholarship does also allow me to provide an alternative account to Tilly's argument about the emergence of an autonomous popular action, when compared with the food riots of the eighteenth century.

In this chapter I try to render my analytical tool - social movement as a logic of antagonistic action - more adequate for the investigation of a complex popular movement, borrowing concepts from Touraine's sociology of action. In the case of artisans or outworkers of the early nineteenth century, the collective action of labour stretches out of the workplace, the local community and the particularity of the trade, in order to envisage a project of challenging social domination. In this way it structures a model of conflict with opponents defined within civil society. The content of this model can be analysed through reconstructing the principles of identity, opposition and totality - the utopia - which are articulated by the leaders and the activists themselves.

In E.P. Thompson's scholarship I found material for reflecting on my argument, conceived in the context of social movements theory, as Thompson takes social

relations of domination into account as well as emphasising the resilience and creativity of popular strata in building up an autonomous movement. A closer look at artisan action in the light of subsequent work in social history, however, allows one to highlight the difference with the class model of conflict of the early twentieth century, which is considered in Chapters Five and Six. Taking the content of the artisan model of conflict into account, I attempt to explain the prominence of Radicalism in the popular movement as a whole, particularly in its Chartist phase when the integration of the action of popular strata reaches its highest point.

Chapter Four is concerned with the dynamics of labour action in the decades between *circa* 1850 and 1880, and their actual consequences for the popular movement as a whole. Three case-studies are selected, drawing from existing historiographical literature: the engineers and shipyard workers of North-east England, the miners of County Durham and the Lancashire cotton workers. The decline of the logic of social movement in labour action is highlighted in the experience of factory artisans, who yet build during these decades powerful organisations and are able to exercise a considerable degree of control over work organisation. However, workers' acceptance of the discourse of progress, which is articulated by industrialists in the context of the expanding factory system, empties the principle of totality of the artisan model of conflict: the utopia of self-managed workshops where tradesmen could freely retain their work customs. Skilled workers structure a conflict with their employers, but for the time being they do not envisage a project for the overthrow of domination in the factory and society as a whole.

Skilled workers such as the engineers, continue to articulate an identity of trade in their action, but in this way they are precluded from a convergence with the unskilled, whereas the co-ordination between trade unions is limited to a thin activity of pressure on the political system. It is no longer possible to talk in terms of an integrated popular movement for the Britain of these decades, at the same time as suffrage reforms open the political system to wider sections of the popular strata, thus urging a restructuring of traditional political forms and discourses. In the absence of an autonomous discourse which challenges domination at the level of civil society, working and popular strata are unable to build independent political organisations, and are attracted towards the spheres of influence of either party of their social opponents.

Compared with the artisan action of the first half of the century, labour action restricts its horizons. Popular politics in general disintegrated, while either passivity or heteronomy prevail. However, the chapter also highlights the actuality of dynamics which, in the light of subsequent processes, can be interpreted as steps towards the construction of a new autonomous movement of the popular strata. Where, as in County Durham, the miners are able to build up an autonomous union organisation, they succeed in achieving the integration between the different categories of workers in the coalfield. The miners do not speak the language of trade, but either articulate an identity of the local community or, with the new developments of the late 1880s in mining unionism, of a nation-wide interest group which for the moment searches for

only occasional convergence with other workers.

Finally, Chapter Five and Six deal with the emergence and consolidation of a new popular movement which is characterised by the unprecedented centrality assumed by labour action and organisations. Analytical primacy is given to the emergence of a new logic of social movement in the discourse and action of workers. This is analysed according to its principles of identity, opposition and totality; whereas a logic of interests co-exists, in the actuality of labour action, alongside the model of conflict which is structured by the logic of social movement.

The ideology of socialism allows labour action to criticise industrial management without rejecting the application of science and technology to the productive process; it becomes indeed possible to criticise private industrialists on the grounds of their selfishness which restrains further progress. The process of self-organisation by the unskilled renders credible the discourse of class which becomes component part of the actual debate developing within the unions. As the process of integrating different popular strata continues, it is possible to show the emergence of a popular movement, which tries to build up its independent political representation and to integrate popular strata at this level as well. These processes accelerate with the wave of labour mobilisations of the 1910s and reach their highest point, in this reconstruction which stops in the early 1920s, when the Labour Party consolidates its position as a contender for the political leadership of the country.

The new model of antagonistic conflict is observed in the action and discourse of the 'unofficial' miners of South Wales and the leaders of the metalworkers' workshop committees on the Clyde, because there it is articulated in its fullness as: 1) class action; 2) struggles against specific opponents which are defined as one general antagonist; 3) a project of society's reconstruction, which is, on the one hand, based on workers' power in the workplaces and society as a whole, and, on the other, aims to combine the ethics of workers' solidarity with the further development of the productive forces (especially in the discourse of the engineers). In these cases, the logic of the social movement turns out to conceive labour action as an upward process which unfolds, through conflict, from the achieved, or defended, autonomy at the workplace; and is extended as a claim for absolute power in the mines and factories, as well as for the control of investments and the economy, also thanks to the hold on political power which is demanded by the same institutions of workers' self-organisation.

Analytical primacy is given to the logic of social movement and the model of conflict because the different positions within the debate inside the actual movement, which are reconstructed in the chapter, can be seen as selective appropriation and modification of some of the three dimensions of the model of conflict (identity, opposition and totality). Also in the (actually prevalent) components which reject a conception of class struggle as antagonistic, there is a reference to class as the principle of identity which claims the unity of workers and popular strata, and/or to a perspective of "new social order" which is ethically and/or scientifically superior to

the domination of the industrialists. Even the conception of Labour as a nation-wide interest group presupposes the integration between skilled and unskilled which is advocated by class action.

The process of development of the popular movement outside the workplaces, namely at the urban level, is also recounted. To it are linked the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party as well. Accounts of those local situations where the development of the popular movement is most pronounced show different trajectories of growth, with the movement developing mainly on either the urban or the workplace terrain. To these actualities does the leadership, within the movement, of the respectively political or civil-society institution correspond. Within labour action in Britain, the logic of interests actually prevails over the logic of social movement, which is weakened both by the economic crisis and by the choice of the majority of the engineers to contend for the control of work organisation as a trade. But even before then, the political wing of the popular movement is committed, in its overwhelming majority, to a constitutional path to political power, because of the open character of the political system which allows the representation of the interests of workers and popular strata.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF PROTEST

The diversity of approaches in the study of social movements has given rise to an ongoing debate. One article by Jean Cohen contains a review of the controversies, with a focus on the new movements which have emerged in the Western world since the 1960s, such as the environmentalists, the women's and peace movements. Cohen draws a distinction between theoretical approaches, originally developed in the United States, which emphasise the strategic dimension in the action of movements, and other, mainly European frameworks, where the "newness" of contemporary movements consists in dimensions of collective action which cannot be reduced to the pursuit of interests. These features are then explained through general interpretations of contemporary Western societies, with different emphases on continuity or change (Cohen 1985). Starting from the assumption of the plurality of logics which are components of the actual action of contemporary movements, Cohen and other scholars have suggested the possibility of incorporating American and European approaches (Melucci 1989: 21-2; Cohen and Arato 1992: ch. 10; Farro 2000). My study also follows in this wake and in this chapter I will attempt a definition of that (possible) component within collective action which demarcates a social movement from an interest group (see above 1-4).

What I am searching for is a definition of a social movement which can be

employed in the analysis of labour action in Britain, at a time when that movement was gaining a central place in the social and political life of the country. The reference to domination in civil society which is contained in my definition of social movement would make it extendible to contemporary movements as well (see Farro 2000). This reference to social domination is however ignored by the tradition of studies on social movements, which has been developed in the U.S. from the 1950s up to now.

The following review considers the collective behavior approach (1-1), the resource mobilization theory (1-2) and the political process model (1-3) and highlights the definitions of social movement that they respectively endorse. They will be considered as a unitary tradition because they share a common theoretical premiss in a pluralist understanding of society and politics. Society is either seen as a cultural and normative order that reproduces itself unproblematically or as an arena of competition between groups, which attempt to represent their interests at the institutional level of the political system. Social movements are consequently constructed as those phenomena that are located outside these processes, either because an external occurrence has disrupted order or because one social group is prevented access to the political system.

Despite the theoretical shifts the field has witnessed, the concept of social movement is constructed in this tradition around the notion of protest. From this viewpoint it stands as an obstacle to conceptualising the social movement as an analytical component within collective action. To define social movements as protest has two consequences. Firstly, when the analyses take as their objects

protest events or series of events such as protest waves, the investigation of social movements consists in the search for empirical regularities in the occurrence of those events. It then gives rise to an inconclusive debate that revolves around the attempt to find a general explanation for the amount of protest over time in different places. Secondly, when the investigation, within the same theoretical approach, takes as its empirical starting point social movements as engaged-in-protest corporate actors, it relies on a definition of social movements which depicts, under the conditions of an open political system, a natural history of the transition from movement to institution.

1- Behaviour under out-of-ordinary situations

The constitution within sociology of a field named "social movements" is due to some U.S. scholars in the Fifties.¹ In this first demarcation, social movements are seen as part of a broader range of empirical phenomena grouped under the label of "collective behavior". These phenomena consist of crowds - including panic, for instance as a reaction to a natural disaster, lynching, a wild-cat strike, a riot -; what they define as diffuse collectivities, such as fads, crazes, public opinion; and social and revolutionary movements (Turner and Killian 1957). As it has been stated more recently (Marx and McAdam 1994: 1):

"... sections of Los Angeles are in flames, by a group of citizens enraged by a verdict exonerating

¹ For a different theoretical construction of the category of social movements cf. Touraine 1988: 63-74.

four policemen whose beating of an African-American man was captured on videotape. Supporters and opponents of abortion take to the street daily. Mexico City searches for answers to a disastrous gas explosion and fire that leveled a forty-square-block area. The number of men wearing ponytails and an earring in one ear; and the number of people saying and understanding "Yo, dude" seems to be increasing. These diverse actions fall within the area sociologists call *collective behavior*".

The emphasis is on the "collective", because "as a group, a collectivity is more than simply a number of individuals. A group always consists of people who are in interaction and whose interaction is affected by some sense that they constitute a unity" (Turner and Killian 1987: 3). The demarcation of the field is obtained through the separation of the phenomena of collective behaviour from the remainder of collective phenomena: "organizational behavior" which "is the behavior of groups that are governed by established rules of procedure" (ibidem: 4), and "institutionalized behavior, which characterizes groups that are envisaged in and guided by the culture of the larger society" (ibidem).

What these authors then need to find is a variable which allows them at the same time to explain the emergence of collective behaviour, as distinct from routinised and institutionalised behaviour, and to re-group seemingly heterogeneous phenomena under this umbrella-concept. To this end they refer to events such as "extraordinary conditions or a precipitating incident", situations when "the taken-for-granted basis of living is somehow shaken" (Turner and Killian 1987: 10 and 50). It is then that individuals engage in "making sense out of confusion", producing shared definitions of the unexpected situation they have to face, and elaborating "emergent norms" which replace the old, customary ones in the

regulation of their common action (ibidem: 26 and 7).² The wide range of phenomena included in the area of collective behaviour are then said to emerge when both a conducive situation and an active, creative response on the part of the interacting individuals, are simultaneously available. The difference amongst the various phenomena within the field consists only in their respective temporal extension: "the time span for social movements is much longer than the time span for demonstrations and riots, and shortest for mass panics" (ibidem: 9). For instance, "the well-publicized night of looting that took place in New York on July 13, 1977, fits the same change/collapse of social order/collective behavior sequence. The rapid change in this case was the power failure, which led to the breakdown in routine social order, which resulted in looting and other illegal behavior. ... But ... a night of looting and a panic in a theater are discrete events, whereas a social movement is a broad collection of events lasting many months and even years" (Marx and McAdam 1994: 78-9).

Social movements are then seen as falling "near the boundary that separates collective behavior from strictly organized and institutionalized behavior. Movements that persist over time increasingly lose the distinctive feature of collective behavior" (Turner and Killian 1987: 230). A movement starts as crowd protest, where the participants display a high degree of spontaneity in dealing with

² This point is emphasised to demarcate their position from the crowd psychology of the turn of the century, including authors such as Le Bon and Tarde. Le Bon, for instance saw popular mass gatherings as characterised by unruliness over the organisation of social life, by the prevalence of unrestrained impulses over the coolness and allegiance to the social order of the normal individual (see Turner and Killian 1987: 19 and 22). The point collective behavior scholars want to make, is that spontaneity, which is never absolute in collective behaviour phenomena thanks to the production of emergent norms, leads in time to a new order. "Thus collective behavior is an

the out-of-the-ordinary situation of confronting the authorities. But already in an isolated protest event there is a higher degree of planning than in a "true panic" (Marx and McAdam 1994: 74-5). If a movement is able to emerge out of a protest event, it enters a life-cycle, where the transition to each further stage is deemed to be contingently actualisable, albeit necessary in case of persistence of the phenomenon. After a preliminary stage of social unrest, through a popular stage and then one of formal organisation, the social movement enters an institutional stage (cf. Turner and Killian 1987: 251-55). When former social movements "become established as permanent interest groups", as objects of investigation they enter the fields of political sociology and political science (cf. Marx and McAdam: 114).

2 – Rational Protest

The subsequent wave of scholarship in the United States severs the study of social movements and political protest from the other phenomena which were grouped under the label of collective behaviour. Oberschall sets at the centre of his theory the notion of "social conflict". This is seen, as more than the overt infringement of the social or political order, as the struggle between groups over material or symbolic resources. He then needs to separate this class of phenomena from institutionalised conflicts, such as contests between parties in a democratic polity, collective bargaining and economic competition between firms. The mark of

integral part of the process of social and cultural change" (Turner and Killian 1957: 526).

social conflict phenomena seems to be some degree of violence. He has in fact in mind events such as "class, racial and communal conflicts, rebellions, insurrections, revolutions, riots, civil disorders, social disturbances, strikes, banditry, nationalist movements, protest demonstrations and so on" (Oberschall 1973: 31). He then tries to reconstruct the conditions leading to the formation of conflict groups and opposition movements which then give rise to those events (ibidem: 118-35). McCarthy and Zald take as empirical units of their investigations mainly organisations as "carriers of social movements" (Gamson 1987: 1; see for instance Zald and Ash Garner 1987, or. publ.: 1966), whereas a social movement is defined as "a set of opinions and beliefs which represent preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society" (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1217-8).

The main theoretical discontinuity that justifies considering this approach - self-defined as "resource mobilization theory" - as distinct from the collective behavior tradition, concerns the choice of drawing models from economics, as this discipline "has a firmer theoretical foundation and a more sophisticated methodology than the other social sciences" (Oberschall 1973: 2). A shared theoretical starting point is provided by Olson's theory of interest groups, predicated on a radically individualistic conception of *homo oeconomicus*. Aimed at explaining why men, though normally pursuing their happiness on an individual basis, sometimes incur the costs of joining or supporting collective organisations, Olson's theory argues that the action of individuals converge only when the pursuit of public goods, characterised by physical indivisibility, is at stake. But Olson goes further, as his optimising man, in case of a large collectivity, would

free ride, rather than commit himself to the collective endeavour. Economic man's cost/reward structure, which as a rule would lead him to opportunism, needs then to be altered by the organisation's provision of "selective incentives", to be lost in case of non participation (cf. Pizzorno 1987b: 12-4).

As was said above, resource mobilization scholars such as McCarthy and Zald define a social movement as a demand for social change; a kind of change which entails - it will be seen - people's involvement in protest activity. Despite this double peculiarity, a social movement is not different from the demand that exists in the economic market for any other good. Therefore the analogy with economics is justified: on the supply-side, "social movement organizations" (SMOs) try to meet this specific demand, in co-operation and/or competition with other organisations (Zald and McCarthy 1987a) which are part of what they call an "industry". This demand for change, capitalised upon by SMOs, can also engender a demand resisting that change, which is then exploited by counter-movements (Zald and Useem 1987). For instance, the pro-life movement (McCarthy 1987) opposes the demand for change on the issue of abortion, which is organised by the pro-choice movement. Social movements are then viewed as "very similar to what political sociologists would call issue cleavages" (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1218). If we add up all the activities which develop around all the issues at a certain point in time in a certain political setting, we obtain the social movement sector (SMS), which seems to be strictly related to the overall amount of protest we can find in a country (see Ash Garner and Zald 1987). That we are talking of extra-institutional or disorderly politics can be derived from the following argument: "indeed the process we are exploring resembles what political scientists

term interest aggregation, except that we are concerned with the margins of the political system rather than with the existing party structures" (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1218).³

Between the first statements of the collective behavior approach in the 1950s and the 1970s, the United States has witnessed the "unanticipated and unprecedented" turbulence of the 1960s (Perrow 1979; cf. also McAdam 1982; Lapeyronnie 1988; Zald 1992); in the terminology of resource mobilization scholars, an expansion of the social movement sector. This approach claims indeed, as a reason for its own emergence, the inadequacy of the available frameworks in giving a convincing explanation for the "stormy Sixties". In the country where, at the beginning of the decade, the "end of the ideology" had just been proclaimed (cf. Zald 1992: 330), there was an increase in the demand for change, unable to be dealt with through the consolidated channels of interest articulation and representation. One of the polemical targets of resource mobilization scholars are relative deprivation

³ Sometimes in the resource mobilization literature, the gains in terms of clarity that Oberschall has obtained over the collective behavior tradition - thanks to severing politics from other phenomena -, are jeopardised, when an association like YMCA is made object of investigation (Zald and Denton 1987). The boundaries of the field are even more blurred and the reader is left puzzled over the term's meaning, when the label social movement is used to designate phenomena in organisations, such as a sudden change of leadership, a successful innovation which is carried through against the will of other sectors of the organisation, or the quarrels between the national and the local level of a union (see Zald and Berger 1987). To reintroduce politics as the main object of concern, resource mobilization scholars need to talk of political social movements as "a subset of all social movement activity. ... Social movements in groups or organizations that are not articulated with pressure on formal authorities are outside of our ken. Similarly, social movements largely aimed at change through recruiting and changing individuals are ignored, unless they articulate with politically oriented activity" (Ash Garner and Zald 1987: 294). A problematic distinction which rules out, for instance, the most distinctive part of the activities of the women's movement (see Cohen and Arato 1992: 548-563).

theories, which accounted for Black politics during the 1960s through arguments of status inconsistency "both in an absolute sense and in relation to whites" (Gurney and Tierney 1982: 36).⁴ How to explain the mobilisation of a group that was previously not engaged in protest activities, although disadvantaged in a similar way? The proponents of the collective behavior approach also criticise relative deprivation theories on the ground that they "take for granted that the crowd behavior is an automatic response to the nature of the situation", whereas "the collective definition of the situation, developed through interaction, may be the crucial factor in determining the course of action" (Turner and Killian 1987: 20-1). Resource mobilization scholars stress other features of collective action. Oberschall points to the "presence of leadership and organization that can channel and sustain popular energies in a constructive direction" (1973: 195). McCarthy and Zald add that "grievances and discontent may be defined, created and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations" (1977: 1215). In his study of the Civil Rights Movement, Oberschall argues that his "key idea is to consider the protest potential of various social strata and groups [among the Black population] along the risk and reward axes and the changing risk/reward ratios for different groups" (1973: 214). Both Oberschall and McCarthy and Zald emphasise the contribution of "conscience constituents". They are external to the pool of

⁴ Oberschall explicitly takes as polemical target also Kornhauser's theory of mass society, which takes rootlessness and alienation as explanatory variable of the participation to anti-institutional movements. On the contrary, "it is precisely the groups least disintegrated that mobilize most rapidly and most effectively to promote their corporate interests" (1973: 123). Moreover, as far as the single group is concerned, "participation in public disturbances and activists in opposition organizations will be recruited primarily from previous active and relatively well integrated individuals within the collectivity, whereas socially isolated, atomized and uprooted individuals will be under-represented, at least until the movement has become substantial" (ibid.: 135).

those underprivileged who - lacking institutional channels of interest representation - would benefit from the attainment of the movement's goals (cf. McAdam 1982: 27 and 122).

The focus of the explanation now needs to move on the variable-through-time availability of external constituents, since it is such presence that can explain the emergence of social movements and the increase of protest, once the grievances of the underprivileged are assumed to be constant. McCarthy and Zald argue that "over time, the relative size of the SMS in any society may vary significantly. In general it will bear a relationship to the amount of wealth in a society". In fact "for most of the population the allocation of resources to SMOs is of lower priority than allocation to basic material needs such as food and shelter" (1977: 1224). Therefore, "the SMOs compete for resources with entertainment, voluntary associations, and organized religion and politics" (ibidem). The overall argument is based upon their belief that "except in time of crisis, the SMS is a low-priority competitor for available resources - it benefits from the satiation of other wants" (ibidem).

Like the collective behavior approach, resource mobilization scholars also need to empirically demarcate social movements from institutional politics, in order to construct them as a sociological sub-field. The conclusions, which are inescapable given the presuppositions upon which the field is constructed, are similar. At the level of events, only when protest occurs, do we talk of social movements. At the level of corporate actors, "a social movement organization becomes a pressure group when it gains routine representation in, and access to, the government"

(Useem and Zald 1987: 273). Where their approach differs from the previous theory is in the explanation of the emergence of social movements, equated with the occurrence of protest. For collective behavior writers these phenomena arise "in out-of-the-ordinary situations characterized by uncertainty and feelings of uneasiness or crisis" (Turner and Killian 1987: 17). On the contrary, according to the resource mobilization perspective, it is a general increase of wealth, which renders available for protest and social movement organisations, resources such as money and time. They also partly differ in the philosophical anthropology and general view of society which underpin their theory of social movements. For the prevailing school in the North-American debate during the 1950s and the 1960s (see Marx and Wood 1975), women and men normally obey the norms of the social settings in which they are located, unless there is a disruptive occurrence or process which compels them collectively to engage in the production of cultural innovation through political protest. On the contrary, according to the theoretical perspective which replaces it as the dominant approach in the field for the following two decades (Morris and Herring 1987; McClurg Muller 1992; Zald 1992), rational women and men further their collective interests through institutional channels (according to Olson only if they are aptly motivated on an individual basis). They then engage in a social movement only when the demand for radical social change is heightened by exceptional circumstances: an era of prosperity, like the States in the 1960s, or the peculiar social condition of being a student and then being able to find time for political protest activity (McCarthy and Zald 1987). In those affluent times, when the larger society can devote more money to charities and social movement organisations, some people can also think of building up careers in professional movement organisations (ibidem). Their

professional life will then depend on their ability to sustain and also manipulate the grievances of groups that were not previously and are not usually mobilised.⁵ "The same techniques that have sold deodorant may also sell social movements, if other conducive factors are present" (Marx and Wood 1975: 402).

3 -- Contentious politics

In constructing the field of social movements around the notion of protest events or engaged-in-protest corporate groups, collective behavior and resource mobilization scholars implicitly rely on an understanding of politics borrowed from the pluralist theoretical model which had been worked out by political science (cf. McAdam 1982; Lapeyronnie 1988; Jenkins 1995). This highlighted differentiation and secularisation as the prevailing institutional and cultural tendencies of modern political systems, where differentiation meant for instance a division of labour between interest groups and political parties in performing the transformation of the demands from civil society into political decisions (Allmond and Powell 1966: 22-5; 77-9). The tractability of the claims issued from civil society was assured by the "increasing specificity of orientation" diffused in U.S. political culture: "the marketplace attitude which permeates the conduct of politics. Politics is seen by the participants as a set of give-and-take interactions,

⁵ In this way the rationale of Olson's argument is respected and developed: "movement entrepreneurs motivated by the selective incentives of career opportunities offer selective incentives to members for their contributions, creating an expanding cycle of collective actions and further mobilization" (Jenkins 1983: 536).

in which each side bargains for a set of more or less limited objectives" (Allmond and Powell 1966: 59 and 57). A specific notion of political participation is logically complementary to the pluralist framework: "civic participation", which is based on the transposition at the political level of a private position in civil society (Pizzorno 1970: 60). U.S. political arrangements in the 1950s were then viewed as "the ideal of stability and integration, accomplished thanks to a balanced participatory democracy" (Lapeyronnie 1988: 595), as it was assumed that "a certain degree of passivity and lack of involvement is functionally necessary to secure democratic processes" (Wagner 1994: 115).

It is in this theoretical context that attempts to explain the occurrence of protest and the emergence of social movements take place. Social movements are then defined as those collective actors which, unlike institutionalised interest groups, resort to unconventional means of political action. They are theoretically constructed as anomalous phenomena, viewed from the standpoint of mainstream politics, as the latter develops in institutional settings where the politics of interests, as pluralists argue, ensures the smooth composition of conflicts (see also 2-1 below).

The distance between institutional politics and social movements is as its greatest in the collective behavior tradition. The occurrence of those collective behaviour episodes that have more of a political character is due, in the same way as a panic, to traumatic events or disruptive processes which break the orderly reproduction of the routine and institutional order. For resource mobilization theorists the hiatus

between the unruly politics of social movements and the orderly politics of institutional actors is shortened. On the one hand, social movement leaders pursue their own career strategies like any institutional politician or, indeed, like any rational professional. On the other, the logic of "political man" and woman is not different from the one followed by any consumer of whatever good. The politics of a social movement however responds to the logic of the consumption of a luxury good (Lapeyronnie 1988: 605). It is only when there is an over-supply of resources - money in affluent times or time in the student condition -, that a demand for radical change is generated. Protest is associated with this kind of demand which for conscience constituents, unlike for beneficiary-ones, does not respond to a logic of interests, but rather of leisure.

The third wave of scholarship in the U.S. sociology of social movements further reduces the distance between protest, as the political expression of social movements, and the politics which is carried out within the institutional polity. For these scholars, it is wrong and ideological to postulate a different logic underlying the strategies of, on the one hand, protesters and, on the other, institutional interest groups, political parties and authorities, as collective behavior and relative deprivation approaches do. A model of politics of interests is the best to make sense of both protest and institutional dynamics; a move that pushes forward insights already developed by resource mobilization scholars.⁶

⁶ While some of the proponents of the new approach stress the distinctiveness of their contribution (for instance McAdam 1982), first-generation resource mobilization theorists prefer to talk of two variants within the same approach (Perrow 1979; Zald 1991 and 1992). Tilly (1978) takes the intermediate position of seeing his "polity model" as an integration of a "mobilization model". Reviews of the debate are also divided on the issue. Whereas Jenkins (1983) emphasises the continuity between the resource mobilization theory and the political process model, Morris and

Where the distance from the resource mobilization theory is more pronounced is in the explanation of the emergence of protest. The search for factors external to the group itself is considered to be unnecessary. McAdam, for example, criticises Oberschall for having neglected the cultural process that alters the representation of their own situation held by the Black community. An adequate picture of the conditions conducive to the mobilisation of the Afro-American community in the Civil Rights movement, has to include what he defines as a process of "cognitive liberation" (McAdam 1982: 34-5).

The problem of the U.S. sociology of social movements, however, because of its dependence on pluralist political science, is always to explain why certain claims cannot be processed through the institutional channels of the democratic polity. Assuming that "the discontented are no more nor less rational than other political actors" (Gamson 1975: 137), how is one to account for the resort to unconventional politics including violence? Collective behavior scholars are wrong in searching for events or processes that represent outbreaks in the otherwise normal routines of social life. Resource mobilization theory, in putting the weight of explanation onto external resources, underestimates the capacity for cultural articulation and self-organisation (as gathering resources) of disadvantaged groups who engage in extra-institutional politics. If McCarthy and Zald deem affluence to be decisive to account for the occurrence of political protest in the 1960s, this is far from constituting a general theory of conflict (in Oberschall's sense). Historical sociologists such as Charles Tilly and his

Herring (1987) treat the two theoretical frameworks as distinct.

associates (1975) show that in the Europe of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century the disorderliness of popular politics was not an exception. Nor has U.S. politics been, Gamson points out (1975: pp. 9-12) in his study of political protest and violence across a comparable time-span, that heaven of smooth containment of conflict within the institutional framework that pluralist political scientists have depicted.

To give new answers to the 'genetic issue' at the centre of North-American sociology of social movements - namely what are the variables influencing the occurrence of protest and what are the processes operating in the emergence of a movement, as a corporate actor engaged in extra-institutional politics up to the use of violence -, this third wave of scholars question the picture of the U.S. political system worked out by mainstream political science. As Gamson puts it: "the pluralist interpretation seems more vulnerable and in need of modification on the issue of permeability and openness to efforts at change" (1975: 11). If "rebellion, in this view, is simply politics by other means" (ibidem: 135), according to these scholars, it is the relation between the political system and social movement constituencies which is the crucial locus for searching for where and when protest, either violent or not, does emerge. More specifically, Tilly distinguishes between "members" and "challengers" within the complex of the polity's "contenders" (1978: 52-3; see also Gamson 1975: 140). It is then to the outside position of interest groups in relation to the political system that the occurrence of protest can be related. Protest is then strategically rational, as challengers, unlike members, do not have "routine, low-cost access to resources controlled by the government",

thereby resorting to such a costly means as protest (Tilly 1978: 52 and 99; cf. also Zald 1992). Protest is also seen, unlike resource mobilization and especially collective behavior scholars, as straightforwardly political. Generalising from the Civil Rights movement, despite its peculiarity of emanating from a "minority community", McAdam argues that "emerging, as they do, among excluded groups, social movements embody an implicit demand for more influence in political decision-making". In other words, they aim at "a restructuring of polity membership" (1982: 40 and 26).

The self-defined "political process model" (see Tilly *et al.* 1975; McAdam 1982) claims to have thus highlighted the key variable which can account for protest: when, in a certain national context, a wave of protest - namely, "a sequence of escalating collective action exhibiting greater frequency and intensity than normal" (McClurg Muller 1992: 14) - occurs. The same variable is also used to address the other issue that a pluralist-oriented sociology of social movements is sensitive to: when protest, afterwards, declines. Collective behavior scholars related this process to the re-establishment of the unproblematic reproduction both of social routines and normative order, once the disruptive event or dynamics of change had been reabsorbed. Both processes, or rather this double movement of rising and declining of cycles of protest, is now made dependent on what the new research program defines as the "political opportunity structure" (cf. Tilly *et al.* 1975: 294), i.e. the interplay between outside challengers and members of the polity.

Having brought into focus this area of inquiry, these scholars seek for those

mechanisms in the political opportunity structure which can serve as a general explanation for the ups and downs of the curve representing time-series of protest events. One of these mechanisms which accounts for the ascending phase of protest waves is the creation of coalitions between outsiders and some of the insiders (Tilly 1978: 126; Tarrow 1998: 88). The established members want to strategically exploit the pressure of the challengers in order to gain a competitive advantage over the other contenders within the polity, as all are engaged in the struggle for those resources which are controlled by the political system. Another mechanism such as the response of government to the open expression of grievances and claims is held responsible for the possibly violent character of popular political mobilisation (Tilly *et al.* 1975). Finally, it is the inclusion into the polity of the protesting group that can account for its declining protest activity (Tilly 1978: 133; Tarrow 1989: 344; see also 2-4 below).

This latter mechanism derives almost automatically from the definition of social movement given above. If social movements are engaged-in-protest interest groups; if the claims they put forward have, as their target, resources under the control of the political system; if they aim to be included into the political system, their successful protest - provided that the political system is sufficiently open - marks the transition from movement to institution, from a protest group to an institutional actor. Hence, to define social movements as ontologically linked to the occurrence of protest entails that the decline of the mobilisation leading to protest is equated to the decline of the social movement *tout court*.

4 – Social movement as logic of action

In their study of collective violence in Europe from 1830 to 1930, Charles Tilly and his associates collected evidence related to events of political violence from two national newspapers. Consequently, the generalisations which are drawn from this empirical study do not refer to collective action as such, but rather primarily to violence.⁷ The issue of explaining popular violence was actually at the origin of the debate in the United States on protest. Given the reliance on a pluralist political science, this is far from being surprising. Pluralist scholars claim in fact that liberal-democratic polities have solved the problem of sovereignty's legitimacy, as they are able to channel social struggles into the form of competing interests. Since interests can be processed through the workings of the political system, the resort to violence is rendered superfluous (see also 2-1 below). The first attempt at explanation was advanced by the behaviourist approach of relative deprivation. It postulated a relation of stimulus-response based on the "frustration-aggression link", in this way trying to explain outbursts of popular violence up to revolutions (Gurney and Tierney 1982). As a criticism of this perspective, collective behavior scholars stressed the creative activity of cultural elaboration that aggrieved individuals engage in. It had however to postulate that "the need for

⁷ They however write: "We are concerned chiefly with learning how large social changes affect collective action. We have simply chosen to use violence as a tracer of collective action" (Tilly *et al.* 1975: 287). That is because collective violence is a "by-product of collective action" (ibidem: 243). "Collective action covers a wide range of behavior whose connections and common properties deserve attention: not only almost all behavior which authorities call "protest", "rebellion", or one of the other disparaging epithets, but also petitioning, parading, bloc voting, and any number of other ways of acting together which authorities tolerate or even encourage"

collective action [is] created by social disintegration" (Turner and Killian 1957: 21). It is in this context that Charles Tilly made his early contribution to the debate. Relative deprivation and "breakdown model" scholars, the intellectual ancestor of the latter approach being traced by him to Durkheim (see especially Tilly 1981: ch.4), are in fact the polemical targets of this study.

In order to refute those hypotheses on the causes of political violence, the Tillys construct quantitative time-series of events of collective violence in France, Italy and Germany (the *explanandum*) and relate them to other time-series, which represent respectively variables of economic hardship and of social disorganisation (as would-be *explanans* for the rival theories). As empirical unity of the so-called dependent variable, they take "any event in which at least one group of fifty persons or more took direct part in an action during which some persons or objects were damaged or seized over resistance" (Tilly *et al.* 1975: 56). The study of particular national cases is supposed to lead to the detection of empirical regularities. By the use of statistical techniques, it is attempted to find out, in the variation through time of different independent variables, the one that best co-variates with the dependent-one, which is then considered to be the cause of the phenomenon to be explained. France, Italy and Germany display similarities in this respect (*ibidem*: 246-7) and this can be used to construct a general theory of protest.⁸

(Tilly 1981b: 17).

⁸ The development of this research program consists in the gathering of further empirical evidence concerning other macro-areas of the world, in order to identify, through a process of progressive generalisation, the phenomena which "structure the dynamics of contentious politics" (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1996: 31). "Contention begins when people collectively make claims on other people, claims which if realized would affect those others' interests. Claims run from humble

On the basis of this empirical work, the Tillys show that clusters of protest events neither coincide with times of economic hardship, as relative deprivation scholars would tend to see, nor occur when processes disrupting social order, such as industrialisation and urbanisation, are more rapid and wide-ranging, as one would predict on the basis of the "breakdown model". Instead, Tilly discovers "the rough correspondence of major bursts of collective violence with major crises of the French political system" (ibidem: 56). This method of detecting general causes on the basis of finding empirical regularities, however, raises more than one doubt. Anti-empiricist social theory and philosophy of social science have long and convincingly argued against this methodology and its hidden ontology of discrete events, showing its untenability and inability also to account for scientific activity in the natural sciences (Bhaskar 1989: 15; 1978). The level of generality to which scientific activity aims, when it claims to have discovered laws describing real causal mechanisms, is unattainable through the method of accumulating empirical evidence and its implied symmetry between explanation and prediction (Bhaskar 1989: in particular 129-40; see also Manicas 1989). The empirical verification of causal laws, at which the U.S. sociology of protest aims, is possible only in the natural sciences, thanks to the artificial closure that scientists are able to perform via experimental activity (Bhaskar 1978: ch. 2; Bhaskar 1989: 9-10). This

supplications to brutal attacks, passing through petitions, chanted demands, and revolutionary manifestos. ... We include collective interaction in contentious politics in so far as: 1) it involves contention: the making of interest-entailing claims on others; and 2) at least one party to the interaction (including third parties) is a government: an organization controlling the principal concentrated means of coercion within a defined territory. Social movements, cycles of protest, and revolutions all fall within this range of phenomena. Our broader canvas will help relate phenomena, both to one another, to institutional politics, and historical social change" (ibidem: pp. 17-8). Also ethnic mobilisation is included (ibidem: 17).

however does not amount to relapse into scepticism toward the possibility both of an empirical social science, for example in the form of analytical histories, and of the search for causal tendencies on a theoretical plane, which can help to redescribe, at the level of the particular, diachronic actual processes and indeed make analytical narratives possible in the first place (Archer 1995: 343-4).

The conflation between the empirical - what scientists can record thanks to certain, historically transitive, methods and instruments -, the actual - the redescrivable events and processes - and the real - as the causal tendencies that may be unactualised and/or undetected - (Bhaskar 1978: for instance 12-3; Bhaskar 1989), leads empiricist sociology of social movements, as it has been developed in the U.S. since the 1950s, to shape their research object in the unresolvable form of a search for the *key variable* that can account monocausally for the occurrence of a certain class of events: events of protest or collective action or political violence, identified according to certain empirical characteristics. We end up with statements of the kind: "whatever effects structural changes outside the political sphere like urbanization and industrialization may have had on the pattern and extent of collective violence, those effects were largely indirect, mediated by the political structure" (Tilly *et al.* 1975: 24). Or, still referring to "economic and demographic transformation", "the general timing of collective violence in Italy does not challenge the significance of these matters for political conflict; it challenges the more special but widely held idea that rapid structural change itself tends to generate protest, conflict and violence" (*ibidem*: 129). Both arguments may be true, but are not particularly meaningful. They are not because empiricist sociology of social movements

confounds the search for causal explanation with the investigation of the supposed impact that empirical processes would have on the occurrence of events (after having operationalised both into quantitative time-series).⁹

Nevertheless, some of the Tillys' conclusions appear plausible. When they aptly sever political violence from those political activities such as protest, in the form for instance of strikes, marches or gatherings - detectable through newspapers or official statistical sources -, they argue for a correspondence, on the one hand, between popular violence and state repression, and on the other between protest in general and the degree of organisation attained by popular strata. It is undeniable that violence in Italy during 1898 was due to the repressive activity of the Crispi government, or that strikes occurred in the 1880s and 1890s in those areas where peasants had reached a certain degree of self-organisation, or that repression sometimes works, when immediately after 1898 "there was a fall off of group activity throughout Italy", and then "the anarchists tried bombs and assassinations" (pp. 162-4). These narratives, however, correct as they are at the particular national level, engender virtual truisms on the plane of generalisation, especially when they emphasise the relation between organisation and protest in the conditions of modernity. As such, their usefulness only lies in dispelling the prejudices held by 19th-century political elites and some intellectuals, according to which popular masses are tendentially violent, sometimes irrationally erupting into extra-institutional politics.

The Tillys' mistake seems to consist in their mirroring the research object as it had

⁹ See for other cases in which this epistemology of social science is adopted, Marx and Wood

been shaped by their predecessors, that they choose as their polemical targets. In the familiar double perspective, when it is seen as protest events or cycles, "a social movement is a sustained *interaction* between mighty people and others lacking might" (McAdam *et al.* 1996); and when viewed as a corporate actor, it is defined as an aspiring new entrant into the polity (see, besides the above mentioned McAdam 1982, Tilly *et al.* 1975).

It has been the aim of this chapter to show that to construct social movements as coterminous with contentious politics, thereby ontologically linking them with the occurrence of protest, makes sense only if it is assumed that pluralist political arrangements are able to process any sort of claim, thereby rendering them manageable within the decision-making processes of the political system. However, alternative ontologies of the social world, which stem from the critique of empiricist social theory, may lead to a different definition of social movements, which is the aim of this work. The difference between interest groups and social movements will be related to a distinction of logics of action which may coexist in the actuality of a corporate actor and/or a protest event (or cycle).¹⁰ However, more importantly for the argument which has been developed so far, this distinction will be uncoupled from the difference between protest as contentious politics and institutional politics. It is plausible that, as resource mobilization and

1975: for instance 382 and Gurney and Tierney 1982: in particular 38, 41-2.

¹⁰ "Ordinary things may be conceived, metaphysically, as *compounds*. This allows to make sense of the *individuality* of historical particulars; just as the conception of ordinary events as 'conjunctures' allows to make sense of the uniqueness of historical events" (Bhaskar 1978: 277). In addition, it is only on the basis of seeing the social movement as a (real) logic of action that a taxonomy of (actual) corporate actors and protest events/cycles is possible. (See *ibidem* - especially pp. 211-2 - for the link between definition and taxonomy; and Touraine 1985 for the

political process scholars rightly argue, collective actors need to gather resources in order to engage in protest (Farro 1992). More dubious is whether the social movement as a logic of action (as it can be found in the contemporary women's movement) normally tends to engage in protest directed to decision-making systems. It is also certain that the logic of the social movement is coupled with an activity of cultural elaboration which the collective behavior approach points its attention to. However, this is far from saying that protest events or protesting corporate actors always engage with a logic of social movement, although they certainly may be bearers of a logic of interests. (For instance, farmers engaging in protest against EU policy on milk quotas.) Conversely, neither the politics of social movement unfolds only in protest, nor the logic of social movement aims primarily at, although it may be interested in, representation within the polity. The environmentalist and the women's movements cannot be reduced to pressure groups, although they do not exclude political lobbying among their means of action (Farro 1992; Cohen and Arato 1992). So, why then collapse the concept of social movement into the notion of protest, as U.S. sociology of social movement persistently does, despite differences among its various strands; and onto the dynamics of the political system, following the contribution of the political process model?

For speaking of social movement as a distinct logic of action to be possible, it is then also necessary to refuse the reduction of politics to the politics of interest.¹¹

development of such link in relation to social movements.)

¹¹ There has more recently been a critical reaction to the utilitarian imprinting that resource mobilization and political process models inherited from Olson. Radicalising insights already put forward by Fireman and Gamson (1979), this latest tendency of the debate has meant, especially

More specifically, it is essential to resist the conflation between the political system and (civil) society, which is committed by political pluralism and reproduced by pluralist sociology of protest. This conflation is due to the assumption of an ontological homology between the two spheres, where both would be characterised by relations of competition for resources among groups. Political process scholars then need to compensate for ignoring this distinction, by introducing an actual difference between insiders and outsiders relative to the polity, to which the occurrence of protest events is related. On the contrary, the distinction I would like to develop is based on the recognition of the real existence of relations of domination - coexisting with the reality of stratification - at the level of civil society. To domination may the actual resistance of dominated people correspond (Scott 1990); an actuality which is normally undetectable through the empirical investigation of newspapers sources. From such resistance an action may be developed which contains a component of antagonism that cannot be absorbed through the institutional machinery of conflict resolution,

with reference to new social movements (Mc Clurg Muller 1992; Marx Ferree 1992), a revival of cultural constructionist approaches in the field, whose inspiration may be traced back to the collective behavior theory. In this way, it is pointed to an integration between the two rival perspectives, a move that Turner (1980) had already advocated. According to some scholars (Muller 1992; Zald 1991 and 1992), this new shift does not question the basic tenets and therefore the validity of resource mobilization approach, whereas other scholars (Marx Ferree 1992) propose a "post-RM view" to the study of social movements. According still to others (Lapeyronnie 1988), resource mobilization is obliged to elaborate a theory of political commitment, because of the theoretical impasse in which strategic rationality finds itself when it has to explain political activism. However, by opening to cultural constructionist themes - Lapeyronnie concludes -, the approach loses its internal consistency, thereby exploding rather than being re-invigorated. A discussion of the debate in the 1990s can be found in Tarrow 1998 and Della Porta and Diani 1999, which incorporate the contribution of cultural constructionism. There it can be seen that social movements are always constructed as phenomena of extra-institutional protest (see for instance Tarrow 1998: 2-3).

including the procedures of the political system.

If this argument had a certain plausibility, the revision that scholars like Gamson and McAdam propose of orthodox pluralism would still be deficient. It might in fact be shown that their criticism is directed to its empirical conclusions, relatively to the alleged openness of U.S. and, more generally, Western political systems, rather than to its theoretical premisses (cf. Jenkins 1995: 35). If *contra* scepticism, there is anything like a growth in knowledge, that would mean, in this field of sociology, the acknowledgement of the normality of popular collective movements, and the recognition that participation makes sense for the people involved; subjective meanings that need to be taken seriously into account. In this sense post-war accounts would mark a progress over 19th century accounts of the psychology of the crowd. The contribution of the political process model, following resource mobilization theory, is to have dispelled the ambiguities of collective behavior accounts, based on the counterposition of rational elites vs. irrational popular politics. But it shares with its opponents the dichotomy between unconventional and institutional politics, movements and institutions. This chapter has been devoted to showing that this happens because all these approaches maintain a reliance on pluralist political science, with which they agree on a division of labour as two disciplines interested in two distinct domains: the continuity of institutional politics as opposed with the indubitable discontinuity of protest (but dubious if referring to the social movement as a logic of action).

On the contrary, recognising the "ontological depth" of the social world (Bhashar 1989) may assign due relevance to the changing degrees of openness of the

political systems in explaining political radicalism and the violence of protest, provided that these processes are kept analytically distinct from the dynamics of domination-resistance-antagonistic action at the level of civil society. It then opened a way to incorporate pluralist insights, in an attempt that aims to be non-eclectic. In Chapter Two this argument will receive a first scrutiny through a general reference to the experience of the labour movement in Western Europe; and in Chapter Five and Six it will guide my analysis of the experience of the British labour movement in the decades *circa* 1880s-1920s.

The approaches that have been discussed in this chapter are, however, unable to lead an investigation, beyond mere empirical description, on issues such as the possible novelty of contemporary movements; or to discriminate between different kinds of events of protest, such as mobilisations where participants define their opponent in social terms or rather oppose an ethnic group on the basis of a discourse of racial superiority. In their being formal elaborations that can be applied to any sort of protest or protesting group, there also lies the weakness of the resource mobilization and political process approaches, which becomes apparent when the inquiry concerns "the nature of the actors and of their modes of action" (Lapeyronnie 1988: 594 and 601).

The most interesting part of the Tillys' study on violence in Europe during the years 1830-1930 is where their generalisations intersect with an attempt at theorising political modernity. They identify a qualitative change in popular politics, coinciding with the entrance of the newly-formed working class into the political arena (in France in 1848 and in Italy around forty years later). The Tillys

detect this transformation in a change in the forms and also contents - as the kinds of claims made and the social background of the participants involved (cf. Tilly *et al* 1975: 268) - of protest: transformation in the repertoires of action (petitions, demonstrations, strikes, mass meetings), in the organisational infrastructure that popular classes create out of and for their protest activity (special-purpose associations) (cf. *ibidem*: 276), and also in the number of participants in each violent event (*ibidem*: 248). At the same time, the previous forms of popular mobilisation such as the urban food riot and the spontaneous land occupation disappear progressively during the century (*ibidem*: 253). More generally, the Tillys delineate a broad transformation that they define as the transition from "reactive" to "proactive protest". Charles Tilly and his associates do not mean that pre-modern protest is not rational (see *ibidem*: 53). They rather argue that the creation of national polities enables popular strata to abandon the defensive standpoint of resisting the social change brought about by capitalism and State-making, in order to make claims over the resources controlled by those social groups which are already in the polity. Inaccurate as this definition may be (for instance in constructing reaction/proaction as dichotomous categories), it nevertheless tries to capture an actual process of change in the European history of the time.

The emergence of autonomous popular action will be considered in Chapter Three with reference to the experience of Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. By indirectly comparing the work of Tilly and E.P. Thompson on the issue, this emergence will instead be related to the development of a logic of social movement in labour action. In this chapter the shortcomings of empiricist

sociology of protest, searching for the explanation of empirical regularities at the level of events, have been exposed, thanks to arguments drawn from realist social theory. Only hints, however, have been given towards an alternative formulation of the other claim of the U.S. sociology of social movements, when the collective actor is assumed to be an empirical unity: the transition from social movement to interest group, from movement to institution under the conditions of an open political system.¹² In the next chapter I will develop the critique of pluralist sociology of protest with particular reference to this argument, through a discussion of the experience of labour movements in Western Europe. This will also allow me to elaborate on the concept of social movement as a logic of antagonistic action, that will be concretely spelled out in relation to the action of manual workers and in preparation for the investigation of the national case of Britain.

¹² Sociologists of protest, indeed, stress also phenomena which go to the opposite direction: for example, the radicalisation of some movement organisations while the social movement as mass protest wave declines (Zald and Ash Garner 1987; Oberschall 1973; McAdam 1982, Tarrow 1989). However, the rationale of Tilly's model points to the conclusion of social movements becoming institutionalised interest groups if they are defined in relation to the political system, once the latter is open (see also 2-4 below).

CHAPTER TWO: DOMINATION AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Like the tradition of the sociology of protest, Pizzorno defines social movements as discontinuous phenomena coterminous with "waves of conflict". His theory of social movements is considered in this chapter because it allows the argument developed so far to be focused more concretely on the labour movement with reference to Western Europe. In addition Pizzorno puts forward a theory of order in pluralist regimes which, in being based on the diffusion of the politics of interests, makes explicit the tacit assumptions of the sociologists of protest (see 1-3 above). In 2-1 I will present the link between Pizzorno's conception of pluralist stability and his theory of social movements. Whereas Pizzorno intends to explain the transition from social movements to interest groups, other pluralist scholars such as Calhoun address the issue of the decline of political radicalism in labour action. For Calhoun as well, the politics of the labour movement is reduced to the politics of interests with the emergence of modern industry. As in the sociology of protest, civil society and the political system are both conceptualised as arenas of competition among interest groups.

This homology between civil society and the political system is questioned in 2-2, where I follow Marx in detecting, after the emergence of a modern civil society, the

reality of social domination in work relations. In 2-3 I define the logic of social movement with reference to labour action. By employing the work of one historian of British labour, it will be seen, firstly, that workers construct collective action out of the resistance against the industrialists' control of work organisation and attempts to widen it, sometimes in the context of initiatives of innovation and rationalisation. Secondly, it will be argued that labour action contains a logic of interests and, thirdly, that a logic of social movement can be highlighted within labour action, when working people tend to overcome the control that merchant capitalists and industrialists exercise over the organisation of work and investments. In this way a conflict is structured against social opponents, where this tendency towards transcending the social order cannot be reabsorbed by the institutional machinery. Resistance and such an antagonistic component within labour action do not coincide nor are (necessarily) related to waves of protest.¹ Even though they can be explained only if social domination is conceptualised, the logic of social movement is not determined by it. It rather expresses workers' refusal to be determined by domination, in order to be masters, as far as possible, of their own individual and collective destiny, of their own work and life situation (see Touraine 1995: 286-9).

In 2-4 I will argue for the necessity to distinguish between social antagonism and political radicalism in order to account for the experience of labour movements in Western Europe and Britain in particular. The distinction between civil society and the political system enables us to acknowledge, in the experience of the British labour

¹ I draw the notions of resistance and antagonism from Farro 2000.

movement, the coexistence of political reformism and of a component of social antagonism in the collective action at the level of civil society. It will be seen that pluralist and Marxist studies on the labour movement are prevented from fully recognising the logic of social movement, since both approaches reduce labour action within civil society to the logic of interests. Consequently, they concentrate their attention on the possible political radicalism of the labour movement.

1 - Pluralism and labour radicalism

Craig Calhoun interprets the English labour movement as expressing only a logic of interests. The polemical target of his study is E.P. Thompson's thesis of a continuity in the radicalism of popular politics within the process leading to the formation of the English working class (Thompson 1980; Calhoun 1982). Through denying such continuity, Calhoun intends to assert the essentially reformist character of the English working class that he contrasts with the communitarian radicalism expressed in craftsmen's agitations during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Factory workers can accommodate themselves within the new social order, as industrial modernisation does not threaten their existence as a social group (Calhoun 1982: 140-1). In contrast, communitarian radicalism expresses, not surprisingly with a backward-looking perspective, the impossibility of resistance by artisans, whose very existence is jeopardised by social change. Radicalism is the despairing expression of

groups who are unable to find any interest in industrial development, but can avail themselves, for protest mobilisations, of the resources provided by communitarian closely-knit relations.² Thus, contrary to Marx's thesis, the emergence of the industrial organisation of production marks a de-radicalisation of popular politics (*ibidem*: 142-6).

It is possible to discern in Calhoun's argument echoes of familiar themes from pluralist theories of social and cultural modernisation. In Lipset's words "the amount of class-related political conflict should be reduced as the dynamics of an industrial society undermine the status mechanisms inherited from the feudal pre-capitalist order" (Lipset 1983: 16). In accounting for the national peculiarities in the experiences of Western labour movements, a considerable weight is given to the transition from community to society.³ The development of (civil) society, in dissolving communities, atomises individuals, who, because of the process of cultural modernisation, come to share an orientation towards "achievement and universalism" (*ibidem*). Thus they also share a forward-looking positive reference to social change, and in particular to economic modernisation as the application of science to the organisation of production. "Where the corporate tradition", sooner or later in

² The reference is here to Oberschall's sociology of protest, as having highlighted conditions which restraints the application of Olson's law on the unlikely character of collective action (cf. Calhoun 1982: 292, note 74 and 294, note 96; see 1-2 above).

³ I will assume the second strand of Lipset's argument in 2-4. It consists in considering the degree of openness of the political system as an important variable in explaining the different political orientation which prevail among national labour movements of the Western world.

historical evolution, "broke down or never existed" - as in North America - workers' action developed "interest-group organizations and ideologies" (ibidem: 15).

An evolutionary philosophy of history apparently underlies this classical formulation within the pluralist tradition. Modernity is identified as a unidirectional process, driven by the inner force of rationalisation progressively spreading into economics, politics, society and culture. In the face of such alleged evolution, work conflict, when it is antagonistic, expresses a mere resistance to change, as in the case of E.P. Thompson's artisans who were unable to adapt to industrial progress.

Some other times, pluralist accounts of work conflict are not cast within a discourse which collapses the historical process into a linear evolution whose end-state is the orderly reproduction of sub-systems. In terms of a theory of order, these studies display a more pessimistic tone about the capacity of modern industrial societies to ensure the smooth reproduction of their social and political arrangements. "The resurgence of class struggle in Western Europe" at the end of the 1960s has forced social scientists to be cautious in predicting the irreversible decline of industrial conflict (Pizzorno 1978: 291). In Pizzorno a theory of the cyclical course of radical work conflict substitutes for an evolutionary account of its decline.

Pizzorno recasts pluralist arguments on workers' radicalism without having recourse to an evolutionary philosophy of history. To him the problems of pluralist systems are, on the one hand, those of legitimation and, on the other, of efficiency. Pluralist

order is legitimised by its capacity to represent all interests in the context of a consensus which is given to the procedures of representation and decision-making (Pizzorno 1981: 259 and 261). We have seen this conception implicitly adopted by the sociology of protest, where the opening up of the political system leads to the exhaustion of violent protest and to the transformation of a social movement into an institutionalised interest group (cf. 1-3). That theory would relate the possibility of political stability - i.e. the absence of disruptive protest - to the possibility for exchanges to occur between different groups within the polity. Universalism, to which Lipset makes reference as one modality of the cultural integration of individuals within civil society, is the formal side of the coin. Its reverse side is the substantial particularism of interests in civil society, which allows for their negotiability when they are represented at the political level (Pizzorno 1978: 294).

In early modernity the representation of interests is performed through the estates, who know themselves to be bearers of special interests and therefore self-limit their claims short of challenging state sovereignty (Pizzorno 1981: 256). In a subsequent phase, with classical liberalism, the state comes to recognise the property rights of the individual, retreating into an institutionally-defined sphere (Pizzorno 1987a: 53). Thus the politics of the state becomes "minimal". In addition the nation-state, after its emancipation from religion, takes upon itself the task of offering interpretations of the individual's long-term interests (Pizzorno 1981: 267; 1987a: 54). "As a result individuals acquire that lasting identity thanks to which they can ground their own individual calculation, comparing present losses with future gains (or vice versa).

(Without such an identity the very concept of a 'maximising' individual would be meaningless)" (Pizzorno 1983: 146). Consequently, the politics of civil society can become minimal as well. Individuals exchange goods through contracts, which is a private and non political activity. In terms of legitimacy, owning property means that the individual attaches enough interest to the preservation of the political order. In terms of efficiency, transposing interests from civil society to the political level may cause problems that are solved by limiting representation through the restriction of the franchise. We can therefore talk of "minimal politics": the claims emanating from civil society are negotiable, as their goals are "fairly specific" and often "not organized on a permanent basis" (Pizzorno 1981: 256-7; Pizzorno 1987a: 53).

However, the emergence of mass democracy risks upsetting this balance: the extension of the franchise parallels the process of popular strata self-organising in mass parties, while workers give rise to "stably organized interest groups" (Pizzorno 1981: 250). Concerning the issue of efficiency, a problem of disequilibrium originates in pluralist democracy, given that the demands coming forth from civil society have become "potentially unlimited in number" and the decision-making system is overburdened (Pizzorno 1981: 249). Problems of efficiency arise in the labour market as well. The emergence of institutions of organised labour leads to a politicisation of private interests. Workers ask the political system and the state to be responsive to issues which previously were only a matter of private interaction in civil society. Unlike the situation in collective bargaining, where the interplay between the demand and the supply of labour acts as an equilibrating mechanism through fixing the price,

there is not *prima facie* an equivalent mechanism at work in the labour market under the new conditions of "political exchange" (Pizzorno 1978: 279).

Pizzorno's finding consists in highlighting interest representation as the very mechanism which restores equilibrium in pluralism "as a historical phenomenon". Both the labour market and the decision-making system of the national polity are relieved of an unbearable amount of demands thanks to the task performed by workers' institutionalised groups. In fact the activity of representation involves: the translation of broad issues into specific points; negotiation, which "redefines expectations in the process of reaching a decision"; and the separation between short- and long-term interests (Pizzorno 1981: 259 and 264-5). In assuming the task of autonomously interpreting workers' long-term interests, institutions induce individual workers towards self-restraint of their demands: representation induces "moderation of present demands as a function of the pursuance of future objectives" (Pizzorno 1978: 295). Thus, interest organisation is the "restabilizing mechanism" which counteracts the alteration that the politicisation of private interests and the opening up of the political system bring about on the working of the labour market and of pluralist national polities.

In terms of legitimacy, with political exchange, labour movements become the decisive actors for the dynamics of concession/withdrawal of consent in Western Europe (Pizzorno 1978: 279). Workers' weakness in civil society fosters a wider recourse to political action carried out through organisation and mobilisation, which

entails the use of ideology "seen as a technique for reinforcing organisation" (Pizzorno 1981: 252-3). Ideology, as a further source of interpretation for the individual worker's long-term interests, on the one hand, can limit this action to the pursuit of short-term interests, producing beneficial consequences for the system's efficiency (Pizzorno 1981: 266). On the other hand, ideology is charged with universalism that might be antagonistic to the system. However, firstly, the leaders of organised labour develop interests of their own in the reproduction of the social and political order and "the union delivers the consensus ... of its members, in exchange for more power" (Pizzorno 1981: 265; 1978: 284). Secondly, the mass party has difficulty in developing "an efficient, lasting organisation" in its pure ideological form, namely without taking into account the short-term interests of its members or voters (Pizzorno 1981: 254). The condition for the re-emergence of minimal politics and utilitarian rationality are thus established again.⁴

Pluralist theory thus associates legitimacy with "the nature of competition among collective identities" (Pizzorno 1981: 263): "the 'private' (i.e. uncoordinated but for exchange) nature of all those collective identities that strive with similar resources toward competing goals" (ibidem). In fact "the pluralist system foresees and acknowledges the occurrence of conflicts" (ibidem: 261). In interest or distributive

⁴ According to Pizzorno, conflicts based on the diffusion of ideological beliefs are more easily found within the political cultures of certain European countries, due to cultural traditions remounting to the historical circumstances in which the formation of the modern state took place (Pizzorno 1987a: 43-5; 55). Ideology recalls the opposite of minimal politics, "absolute politics" whose means are "the capacity to induce devotion, self-sacrifice, long-term commitment, hope or illusions of transforming reality". "A most threatening case" occurs when these means "are in the hands of states or other

conflicts, "parties appear to be moved by determined objectives which bring benefits to their members. ... They belong to the same system of relations within which those objectives draw their own value. ... Victory and defeat will consist essentially in a gain or a loss of relative power positions within a system" (Pizzorno 1994: 197). In the minimal politics of distributive conflicts, the structure of power is left "intact as it emerged from social dealings and exchanges" (Pizzorno 1987a: 54). "Here we find individuals with objective interests in common but who evaluate individually what they will do. The criterion of rationality for political action is based on the maximization of individual utilities, which means that political action is performed strictly in exchange for the utility it procures". The presence of large numbers, as implied in mass democracy, establishes the condition for the application of Olson's law, with its effect of discouraging collective action (Pizzorno 1981: 251; see also 1-2 above).

A decisive condition, however, is to be met for individuals to engage only in minimal politics: they need to be assured about their long-term interests. This is possible when both a continuity in time and horizontal ties with fellows are assured to the individual (Pizzorno 1986). In Pizzorno's terminology, this is when she is given an identity. For those who are in a strong position within civil society, as it was seen above, property represents such a source of identity, whereas national integration was a relevant process playing an equivalent function in relation to the workers (Pizzorno 1983: 152; 1981: 267). Only if the individual perceives her identity as stable, will she conceive

collectivities controlling the use of force" (ibidem: 66 and p. 27 for a definition of absolute politics).

of politics as based on a logic of interests, as in this case the individual is given assurance on the constant value attributed to the specific goods she receives in exchanges (Pizzorno 1986).

Consequently, Olson's law is temporarily "suspended" when new collective identities emerge, giving rise to social movements (Pizzorno 1978: 293; 1987b). In such cases we have conflicts which "can become more or less serious, but are potentially critical" for pluralist stability (Pizzorno 1981: 262). In their *statu nascendi*, newly-formed groups are engaged in building an identity for themselves and in seeking recognition from the already-established actors. In this phase they put forward claims which are both universalistic and non-negotiable. Political participation is suddenly and exceptionally high, since it is expressive and not driven by instrumental or strategic rationality (Pizzorno 1978: 293-4). On the one hand, it aims to build solidarity, given that the group is in its formative phase and this is easier to achieve through reference to a universalistic discourse. On the other hand, the action of these groups is not dominated by "the logic of negotiation, which requires *inter alia* that the constraints of a continuing existence of both sides are accepted" (Pizzorno 1980: 275). This kind of action is threatening for the system as "processes of collective identity-formation imply a tendency to absolutise the goals and at the same time to flatten them, so to speak, on the short-term" (ibidem: 269).

The difference with classical pluralist explanations à la Lipset can now emerge. Whilst the latter links the historical decline of labour radicalism to a uni-linear trend

from the particularism of community to the universalism of society, Pizzorno argues for the recurrent emergence of non particularist and antagonistic discourses, associated with the formation of new collective identities. In Pizzorno's reconstruction, there is no specificity of workers' action, which might be linked to the factory and to the conflict for the control of work organisation (see 2-3 below). Workers are an interest group like any other, their action is radical in its formative stage - in most countries of Western Europe at the turn of the century (cf. Pizzorno 1983: 45) - or when its internal composition is suddenly altered, rendering necessary the elaboration of a new collective identity.

Cycles of disorder are phases of "collective enthusiasm" (Pizzorno 1980: 267), where the processes associated with the formation of a new collective identity act as destabilising mechanisms which temporarily inhibit the working of those stabilising ones that operate at the level of efficiency and legitimacy. Conflicts are more intense, new forms of struggle emerge and the claims emanating from civil society are bearers of new contents (ibidem: 264-9). Labour action is a social movement in the period of its rise and during the cycle at the end of the Sixties in Western Europe, especially in Italy. In this country, the rapid social change of the 1960s - with young peasants moving from the South to the factories of the North -, reshuffled the internal composition of the working class, at the same time as new collective identities outside work relations were engaged in their own processes of self-formation. The Italian working class had to elaborate a new collective identity in order to make room for the new unskilled workers, whose massive unionisation was "a novelty in the history of

the Italian labour movement" (ibidem: 260). The peculiarity of the Italian situation rests, *inter alia*, upon the weakness of the unions who utilised, at least in a first phase, the unexpected workers' wave of mobilisation in order to strengthen their position within the political market. Thus the stabilising mechanism of interest representation did not work properly in the Italian situation, a peculiarity which explains why work conflict was more intense and radical than in the other Western European countries (ibidem: 257). But in a subsequent phase "mechanisms of equilibrium" are in operation again, recreating the conditions for the emergence of the politics of interests. In this way the decline of protest and the re-absorption of labour action into the routine of institutionalised politics can be accounted for (ibidem: 265; Pizzorno 1978: 294-5).

To engage with Pizzorno's theory of social movements and interpretation of Western labour movements, is equivalent to dealing with the whole tradition which was dubbed in the first chapter as the sociology of protest. In fact, Pizzorno's theory of social movements can be regarded as a synthesis of the different strands of the sociology of protest. The first part of his argument follows the rationale of the collective behavior approach: a sudden process of social change has to be postulated for the emergence of a social movement, otherwise the social and political order is reproduced on a routine basis. It is only during this phase of social and cultural uncertainty that workers' action can be characterised as a social movement. In a second phase - when, according to Pizzorno, the utilitarian logic regains its hold on workers' action, once the process of formation of a new collective identity is

accomplished - labour action is explained through the mechanism of institutional representation, which has restarted working for stabilisation. The transition from social movement to an institutionalised interest group is explained with a more sophisticated version of Tilly's and McAdam's polity model, which was based on the accession of the challenger to the political system (cf. 1-3 above).

Pizzorno's theory of social movements depicts a cyclical dynamic of social movements emerging from outside the normal dynamics of social systems and then being transformed into non-antagonistic actors. During times of stability the mutual position in which groups stand - in terms of competition for scarce resources - and the activities they engage in - exchanges and distributive conflicts - are similar both in civil society and the political system. In Pizzorno's analytical framework, therefore, a substantial homology is predicated between the action in civil society and in the political system. The argument put forward in the next sections does not deny the reality of relations of competition and the actuality of a logic of interests in the collective action which develops within civil society. It does however intend to challenge the pluralist view that workers' action can only produce distributive conflict in the normal conditions of civil society. My argument will attempt to show that pluralist accounts of the labour movement are one-sidedly blind to the logic of social movement which is also a component of workers' action. As will be shown (cf. 2-3 below), the genesis of this logic can be detected within the workplaces (Price 1982). For such an inquiry to be carried out, reference is needed to the notion of social domination, to which the component of workers' action expressing social

antagonism will be related. Social relations of domination will then be considered in civil society as real as relations of competition.

In the sociological tradition the theme of domination can be ascribed to Marx. In the next section I try to reconstruct the notion of social domination in his account of modern society and the capitalist factory. However, it will be seen that, even though the discovery of its reality is due to Marx's contribution, social domination as analytical category occupies a secondary place in his account. This comes out more clearly when one looks at the Marxist tradition of studies on workers' agency in the factory. To show this point, I will make reference to Burawoy's contribution within industrial sociology, which employs a Marxist theoretical framework in the study of workers' agency on the shop-floor.

Beforehand, I need to refer to one pluralist piece of work which, unlike Pizzorno, assumes the dynamics within the factory to be central for an understanding of workers' action. In his comparative study on workers' politics in the Western world, Charles Sabel emphasises how different strata of workers - mainly skilled and unskilled workers - constitute separate interest groups which interact with others in the factory and in society (Sabel 1982: 190). Their distinctiveness consists in their status and world-views which can be related to the position that each stratum of workers assumes within the production process. Sabel rejects both the Marxist tradition which defines workers as producers, and the utilitarian approach which considers them as consumers. Instead, he explains the political action of each group

of workers on the basis of a culturally-bounded definition of interests, which derives from their present professional condition and future career prospects (ibidem: 6; 31; 80 and 129-30). If we consider skilled workers, their action - their political radicalism or reformism and their militancy or quiescence at the shop-floor - is determined both by the opportunities available in the labour market and by management's organisational choices. For instance, when the latter adopts a Taylorist and Fordist work organisation, it hurts the sense of professional pride which is characteristic of the skilled workers' world-view. In this case, as in Italy at the end of the 1960s, skilled workers join the militancy of the unskilled (ibidem: 148-51). In contrast, in the case of organisational choices making use of their professional competence, skilled workers are prepared to co-operate with managers within the productive process, *thereby* refraining from antagonistic conflict (ibidem: 210).

In 2-3 it will be shown that such a dichotomy prevents an understanding of the complexity of workers' agency within the factory. Reference will be made to the experience of the British labour movement. Britain is the best case for attempting an analysis of the dynamics of conflict at the level of civil society. Since the process of industrialisation historically entailed less intervention by the state, relative to the other large European countries, its civil society has been more autonomous (Kemp 1985; Touraine 1981: 110).⁵ Hence the actuality of conflict between actors located within civil society can be hopefully highlighted with greater neatness. However, an

⁵ The relative larger relevance of workers' action within civil society, as compared with the political system, marks British experience, with the development of unionism preceding the formation of the Socialist Party (unlike in France), and the unions traditionally retaining a stronger influence over the

attempt to conceptualise social domination is needed before proceeding with the analysis of the components of labour action.

2 – Domination in civil society

As was said above, it is to Marx's credit to have introduced the analytical category of domination in social theory. However Marx, on the one hand, prevalently saw workers' action in the context of a world-history, where it was deemed to be decisive for carrying on the progressive task of the bourgeoisie, in this way completing the pre-history of humankind (cf. for instance Marx 1992: 426). For Marx, workers' action against domination firstly takes its meaning from the possibilities it allows for a rupture of the fetters on the further development of the productive forces; secondly and relatedly, from the possibilities it opens up for a complete emancipation of humankind (Marx and Engels 1978: 478 and 491; Marx 1992: 234). Workers, with their action of overturning the domination to which they are subjected, allow humankind the potentiality of gaining control over economic forces as a "real community" (Marx 1992: 234 and 350). At the same time, the contradictions which have characterised both human history and thought - between man and nature, man and man, freedom and necessity and so forth - can be reconciled at a practical level (ibidem: 348). On the other hand, the analysis of the domination to which workers are

party (unlike in Germany). See Duverger 1967: 15-6.

subjected in the factory is overshadowed by Marx's analysis of exploitation, developed as a critique of political economy.

Marx characterises the emergence of modernity in Western societies as a double process of differentiation and change in the nature of domination. In his early essay *On the Jewish Question* he contrasts the "feudal organization of life" with modern civil society. The former was based on the overlapping of political and social relations, with political and social domination both being present, for example, in the relationship between lord and serf. In modernity the "old civil society" undergoes a process of dissolution "into independent individuals - who are related by law just as men in the estates and the guilds were related by privilege" (Marx 1992: 232-3). In depicting the actual split which has occurred in the Western world between civil society and the political state, and which was sanctioned in the post-revolutionary constitutions, Marx opens space for distinguishing between social and political domination (the latter intended in Weber's sense of the use of physical force). Even if one asserts, in Marx's wake, the connection between social and political domination, it is possible to consider them as analytically separate, on the basis of his account of the actual emergence of a specific form of domination.

Marx starts to explore this new form of domination as soon as he encounters political economy. James Mill's fiction that exchange occurs in order for the producer to satisfy his further needs, once his basic-ones have been fulfilled through his own production (Marx 1992: 272-274), is untenable, since for the labourer "it is only as a

worker that he can maintain himself as a physical subject" (ibidem: 325). Against Adam Smith's idea that "society ... is a commercial society", where "each of its members is a merchant" (ibidem: 266), Marx reconstructs the processes of dispossession that bring about the formation of a proletariat which enters the factory because it has been deprived of the means of production. The critique of political economy is then fully developed when he examines in *Capital* the process of exploitation through the theory of surplus-value, after he has denounced in 1844, in a philosophical language, the alienation and the estrangement of labour in the emerging "factory system" (Marx 1992: 285).

The theme of domination in the factory is already present in the *Manuscripts of 1844*. There it is said that capital, as "stored-up labour" assures, quoting Smith, "a certain command of all the labour" (Marx 1992: 295) and that, in parallel to the concentration of capital, "the big capitalist establishes for himself some kind of organization of the instruments of labour" (ibidem: 303). The analysis of the new kind of domination is also developed in *Capital*, where he elaborates on the point already made in the *Manuscripts*. If the worker "regards the product of his labour, his objectified labour as an alien, hostile and powerful object which is independent of him, then his relationship to that object is such that another man - alien, hostile, powerful and independent of him - is its master. If he relates to his own activity as unfree activity, then he relates to it as activity performed in the service, under the rule, coercion and yoke of another man" (ibidem: 331).

In his notes on the *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* (Marx 1976: Appendix), Marx focuses his analysis on the relations of "supremacy and subordination" which are established in industry. With what he calls "formal subsumption of labour", whilst work starts to be employed "far more economically" and, unlike in feudalism, "a purely financial relationship" is established, labour is subjected to the supervision and direction of the capitalist (ibidem: 1026-7). Marx details the previous relations which were transformed into the new relation of domination, distinguishing between other kinds of domination on labour (that he calls patriarchal forms of subjection such as serfdom and vassalage), a situation of independence (like for instance rent-paying farmers and independent craftsmen) and the guild system, in which the master "has precisely the same relationship to his apprentices as a professor to his students" (ibidem: 1028-9).

In the pre-industrial situation "the law that regulates the division of labour in the community acts with the irresistible authority of a law of nature, while each individual craftsman, the smith, the carpenter and so on, conducts in his workshop all the operations of his handicraft in the traditional way, but independently, and without recognizing any authority" (Marx 1976: 479). With the new mode of production, in the first stage of formal subsumption "capital subsumes the labour process as it finds it, that is it takes over an existing labour process, developed by different and more archaic modes of production. ... The work may become more intensive, its duration may be extended, it may become more continuous or orderly under the eyes of the interested capitalist, but in themselves these changes do not affect the character of the

actual labour process, the actual mode of working" (ibidem: 1021). After this phase - that Marx also calls "simple co-operation" (ibidem: 482) -, work organisers intervene in the division of labour within production, thanks to the control they have assured for themselves after having formally subsumed labour. During this second phase, defined as "manufacture", the factory is characterised by a "preponderant influence of the skilled. ... Although [manufacture] ... tends towards the exploitation of women and children in production, this tendency is largely defeated by the habits and the resistance of the male workers. Although the splitting-up of handicrafts lowers the cost of forming the workers, and thereby lowers his value, a long period of apprenticeship is still necessary for certain more difficult kinds of work; moreover, even where it would be superfluous, the workers jealously retain it. ... Capital is constantly compelled to wrestle with the insubordination of the workers. ... Hence the complaint that the workers lack discipline runs through the whole of the period of manufacture" (ibidem: 489-490).

The subsequent transformation of capitalist industry - that Marx calls in his notes "real subsumption of labour" - further develops the tendencies which are characteristic of the new mode of production. In parallel with the increase in production and in the number of workers who are simultaneously employed in the workshops, the owners of the means of production bring about periodical phases of change in the technical and social conditions under which work is performed. "With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers

and in the relations between workers and capitalists" (Marx 1976: 1035). This develops along two dimensions: on the one hand, the application of science and technology to production;⁶ and, on the other, the attempt by management to extend their control over labour, through attacking the autonomy of the skilled workers within the labour process.

Marx quotes one management thinker of the early nineteenth century who argues that 'by the infirmity of human nature it happens that the more skilful the workman, the more self-willed and intractable he is apt to become, and of course the less fit a component of a mechanical system in which he may do a great damage to the whole' (Marx 1976: 490). The organiser of work utilises technical development in order to rationalise the labour process in search of efficiency, and at the same time, to gain full control of the labour process. "It is machines that abolish the role of the handicraftsman as the regulating principle of social production. Thus, on the one hand, the technical reason for the lifelong attachment of the worker to a partial function is swept away. On the other hand, the barriers placed in the way of the domination of capital by this same regulating principle now also fall" (ibidem: 491).

⁶ "... the transformation of production by the conscious use of the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry, etc. for specific ends, technology, etc. and similarly, through the enormous increase of scale corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialized labour that is capable of applying the general products of human development such as mathematics, to the immediate processes of production ...)" (ibidem: 1024).

3 – Workers' resistance and action

Three strands can thus be identified in Marx's analysis of workers' condition and action. Firstly, labour action is seen in the context of the progressive character of modernity and its promises of humankind's emancipation, whose fulfilment is prevented by capitalism as private appropriation. As far as the workers' condition is concerned, the second theme of exploitation prevails over the third of domination: "it is not because he is a leader of industry that he is a capitalist; on the contrary he is a leader of industry because he is a capitalist. The leadership of industry is an attribute of capital, just as in feudal times the function of general and judge were attributes of landed property" (Marx 1976: 450-1).

As it has been shown, Marx's analysis of domination on the one hand highlights the existence of a connection between rationalisation and domination, between the systematic application of science to the labour process by management, and their aim to exercise control over labour. On the other hand, Marx's analysis of social relations in the factory ends with a picture of total domination. In the second part of this section, it will be contended that this argument neglects "actual dynamics of resistance" at the level of the factory (see Price 1982).

Following Marx's theoretical tenet that "the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy" (Marx 1992: 425), more recent industrial sociology has

grounded its analysis of workers' agency on the reality of exploitation between work organisers and labour. The existence of such relationship creates for Marx a situation of antagonistic interests, with workers struggling to reduce the extraction of surplus value/labour which is the essence of capitalist relations of production (Burawoy 1979: 25-30).

The semblance of bourgeois economic categories however - the actualities of wages and profit as opposed to necessary and surplus-labour - masks from workers' consciousness the reality of the extraction of surplus-value. With the emergence of capitalism, relations of production present themselves as natural and a-historical in the view both of the bourgeois political economist and the worker. In contrast to the kind of legitimation which upholds the exploitation of feudal serfs, the reality of capitalist exploitation "does not appear as such at the phenomenal level" (Burawoy 1979: 22-23). An inconsistency is thus determined between proletarians' interests and their action or, quoting Marx's classical formulation in the concluding pages of the *Poverty of Philosophy*, between its being a class-in-itself and -for-itself (cf. Marx and Engels 1978: 218).⁷

Burawoy intends his work in industrial sociology to be a contribution to the debate within twentieth-century Marxism on the discrepancy between the actuality of workers' action and the world-historical role that Marx and Engels attributed to it; or between workers' interest in radical praxis - both as militancy on the shop-floor and

⁷ "How is it that workers do not constitute themselves as a class whose interests are irreconcilable with those of capital?" (Burawoy 1979: 29)

revolutionary politics - and the historical actuality of Western labour movements. Burawoy's empirical research in a US factory in the mid-1970s aims to provide an explanation for what he identifies as the counterpart at the shop-floor level of workers' non-radical politics, namely their co-operation in production under conditions of domination and exploitation. "Why do workers work so hard?" is the problem Burawoy sets to solve in his research (Burawoy 1979: preface, xi). Because relations of exploitation give workers an interest in challenging capitalist domination in the factory and in the national polity, Marxist social scientists set the task for themselves of elaborating, in the context of their accounts of capitalist societies, explanatory theories of the containment of workers' potential radicalism.

Burawoy recalls the role of institutions like collective bargaining and, drawing on Marxist literature, of the State and cultural agencies in producing workers' consent to the social order which would it rather be in their own interest to oppose and overturn (1979: 25; 114-5; 186-88; 196-203). His contribution to this debate is to highlight specific mechanisms, operating in the factory he selects as a case-study, which produce workers' co-operation in the reproduction of the routines of factory work, unaware of their own exploitation being reproduced at the very same time (ibidem: 30). For instance, in getting involved in "games of production" to countervail the monotony of factory semi-skilled work, workers accept to work intensively, lengthening the amount of surplus-labour (ibidem: 81-6). As a further unintended consequence of their involvement in individual "games of production", the solidarity of interests which would stem from their sharing the same condition of exploitation,

is weakened, inhibiting the "making" of collective action as militancy (ibidem: 81). Burawoy's scientific interest in mechanisms such as the "games of production" lies in his search for social processes which contain or distort the human instinct for emancipation (ibidem: 237, note 4). This specific mechanism does not operate at the cognitive level of legitimacy. It rather acts by diverting workers' spontaneous hostility towards management from the construction of a factory-wide solidarity which, in obstructing the reproduction of work routines, would challenge capitalist power at the micro-level of the workplace (ibidem: 27 and 29).

It is interesting to note how, despite their sharply different analytical construction of the category of interests, both pluralists *à la* Sabel and Marxists *à la* Burawoy reach conclusions on factory order and workers' agency on the shop-floor, which are based on the same dichotomy: co-operation in production versus workers' conflictual action. Both see the latter as opposed to participation in the work tasks. According to Sabel, skilled workers withdraw their participation in production and engage in conflict (i.e. they resort to militant protest) when the organisational choices of management offend the integrity of their worldview, based on technical expertise and work ethic. Furthermore, these managerial policies produce, as an aggregate effect, a restriction of their opportunities in the labour market. In the same way, to Burawoy, workers' action which challenges managerial power is predicated on their refusal to co-operate with the management in the achievement of the productive tasks. Hence, the very fact of accepting such co-operation, of being a working worker - so to speak -, produces consent, under the specific organisational circumstances of the "games of

production". There are several points in common between the two perspectives: they both equate work conflict and radical protest or militancy; below that threshold they both assume workers' acceptance of domination. Both neglect the theme of domination, with Sabel apparently denying the reality of domination in the social relations in the workplace, whereas Burawoy gives analytical primacy to the mechanism of exploitation.

Instead, an historian such as Richard Price has given high prominence to the dimension of domination within work relations in order to highlight an important part of workers' agency at the level of the workplace that he retrieves within the historical experience of the British labour movement (1982). Price identifies a long-standing tradition of practices of resistance on the part of British workers which extends up to the decades after World War II. He identifies the main issues on which labour in Britain has tried to resist the imposition coming from management. They concern all the features of the work relationship: from the amount of output and the length of working time, to the arrangements concerning the co-ordination of productive tasks and the measures of control which are devised by management at the shop-floor level, to managerial discretion in defining the levels of employment, to compensation especially when this is determined according to piecework. On the basis of this resistance, and of the solidarity which working people develop, they initiate collective action in order to control, as far as possible, the conditions under which they perform their work (cf. also Farro *et al.* 2000). Furthermore, employing Marx's distinction between formal and real subsumption, Price shows the coexistence of co-operation

and conflict in workers' agency, in accepting the organisation of the factory but at the same time in resisting domination and acting for the control of their own work situation. He wants to draw attention to "the mutuality of resistance and subordination" in workers' experience which is ignored by the accounts of both Sabel and Burawoy, given their dichotomy of participation or militancy (ibidem: 198).

In relation to the sociology of protest, it is necessary to stress that practices of resistance do not necessarily give rise to events of protest. They might in fact be "hidden transcripts" (cf. Scott 1990) that Tilly's methodology, based on newspapers' reports, is unable to detect. Furthermore, resistance is far removed from a behaviourist reaction, since it requires skill and creativity (cf. Scott 1990). Price recalls at length the example of piecework in order to show the continuity over time, despite changed forms, of practices of resistance which are creatively adopted by the workers in the attempt to counteract the initiatives of rationalisation and control by management (Price 1982: 202). Practices of resistance are part of "the informal history of labour post-industrial revolution experience" (ibidem: 197), to which Calhoun is blind when he casts labour action in Britain after Chartism as irremediably confined to economism. More importantly, many struggles as events or cycles of protest are unintelligible without them. Price recalls the conflict in engineering, where the issue of overtime occupied a central role. Such an issue surfaced as a matter of overt nation-wide dispute in 1852, 1889 and 1922 - of those which are reported in official statistics -, but it was also the object of constant contention in the daily running of the industry.

In the narrative of the dynamics of labour action in Britain which follows in the next chapters, a logic of social movement will be shown to develop in labour action when working people attach to their action the meaning of challenging domination in work relations and envisage an alternative order, which is based on their having absolute control over the organisation of work and choices of investment. This has to be seen, however, as not exhausting the meaning of collective action for its participants, but is rather viewed as one analytical component that might be retraced in the actuality of labour action, in correspondence to the reality of domination within work relations. In fact a logic of interests can always be found in labour action, coupled with the logic of social movements. In relation to what he defines as "the multi-dimensional nature of social relationships at the workplace", Price shows how on many issues such as overtime, job manning and work pace, "questions of economy and authority were inextricably mixed". This can be seen both in employers' initiatives for change and in workers' resistance and action as well. For instance, "stonemasons who prohibited worked stone had excellent economic reasons for doing so, but the extent of their ability in this respect was both a reflection and an expression of their power to restrict the full exercise of employers' prerogatives and authority" (Price 1982: 193 and 204).

The analysis of the next chapters will explore the relations between the logic of social movement and the logic of interests as analytical components within labour action. It will be shown that the presence of a logic of social movement, on the one hand, allows labour action to construct an antagonistic conflict against social opponents. On

the other hand, it will be seen that labour action, when it contains a logic of social movement, makes reference to an identity of labour which contains a higher content of universalism than the logic of interests. Consequently, it allows a stronger integration of the action of working people of different productive sectors to develop. Skilled workers' sectionalism, which Sabel assumes by definition and is a persistent concern of Marxist scholars, can in actuality mark the prevalence of a logic of interests within labour action. In his analysis of skilled workers Sabel shows the link between their status and the high degree of autonomy in the labour process and control of the labour market they were endowed with. He also emphasises the further link between their professional pride and work ethic. Sabel, however, discounts the possibility that these same elements of the situation and culture of artisans and factory craftsmen might also ground their antagonism against merchants and industrial management, in the context of wider movements where the logic of interests does not further sectionalism. The capacity showed by artisans and skilled workers, in different historical times, to envisage a future social order where the control of workplaces would be in their hands, was itself nourished by their positive identification with work (see also Touraine *et al.* 1987: 79). Unlike in Burawoy's account, a high degree of co-operation in the organisation of work does not universally foster the renunciation of collective action and of conceiving alternative projects of work organisation.

The empirical part of this study will show that the logic of social movement structures models of conflict which can be analysed through reconstructing the discourse of the

recognised leaders of working people.⁸ This task, like the narrative itself, will be performed through the employment of material and interpretations provided by the historians of the British labour movement. As Price shows, the conflict that labour action structures develops both in the daily running of production and under the pressure of initiatives for change coming from management. Change tries to extend the control that management holds over the organisation of work and may consist, at the same time, in technological innovation. The analysis of models of conflict allows one to show that the collective action which is developed by labour in order to maintain or gain the control of work organisation, takes different stances towards the processes of technological change and work rationalisation. Calhoun and Lipset interpret workers' antagonistic action as mere resistance to change, as the expression of a pre-modern mentality, oriented to tradition (see 2-1 above). It will be seen in Chapter Five and Six, however, that the action of British workers in the decades around 1900 contained a critique of industrialists' domination in the factories and their choices of investment, which is based on the perspective of a more rational and progressive society. Calhoun grounds his argument on the historical evidence that in the work conflict of the early decades of the 19th century artisans' action was oriented to the defence of their customary way of life and work. This different stance towards innovation will be taken as indeed distinguishing the artisan conflict of the early nineteenth century from the class conflict which skilled and unskilled workers constructed from the late 1880s on (cf. chs. 3, 5 and; see also Touraine 1987: 159 and Geary 1981). However, Calhoun's argument about the evolutionary transition from

⁸ I draw the notion of model of conflict from Farro *et al.* 2000. See also 2-1.

artisan radicalism to trade-unionist consciousness of the factory workers neglects the extent to which working people were able to articulate an alternative discourse and, on this basis, popular strata could build up independent political organisations.

Thus a further consequence of the actuality of a logic of social movement within the collective action of working people is that it fostered processes of self-organisation of popular strata on an autonomous basis. The narrative of the next chapters will show the different relationships that each of the two models of social conflict constructed by the collective action of artisans and factory workers respectively, establishes with wider autonomous movements of the popular strata.

4 – Civil society and the political system

The sociology of protest is interested in explaining the occurrence of events of more or less disruptive protest, such as "contentious gatherings" in political sociology (Tilly 1982) or strikes in the sociology of the labour movement (Shorter and Tilly 1974).⁹ The debate within the theory of social movements as protest may be summarised at rock bottom as a divide over whether grievances or resources are the decisive factors in explaining the occurrence of protest events (see Jenkins 1983). In terms borrowed from economics, the divide is between investigating the class of

⁹ It may also have the ambition of being able to predict the occurrence of future events, given the empiricist symmetry between explanation and prediction (see 1-4 above).

factors which would affect the demand for a social movement, like in the relative deprivation theory, or the class of factors which would account for changes in the supply, like in the resource mobilization perspective (see Pizzorno 1987b). In engaging with explaining the turbulence of the 1960s especially in the US, relative deprivation and collective behavior scholars study the condition of the protesters, whereas the followers of the resource mobilization perspective put the weight of explanation on the different availability of resources. In both theoretical frameworks, the methodological intimation is to look at changes in either of these factors in order to account for quantitative variations through time in the occurrence of more or less violent, non-institutional protest.

McAdam's contribution intends to counter what he perceives as an ideological bias within this debate: popular strata are considered to be unable to engage in ideational and organisational activity on an autonomous basis. In the relative deprivation framework, protest is a behaviourist reaction to (objective or perceived) diminution's in the availability of economic resources or social opportunities. In the resource mobilisation theory, popular strata benefit from a higher availability of resources coming from elites, either because of the general condition of affluence, or because they let themselves be influenced by clever and more or less cynical social movement entrepreneurs (see 1-2). To popular politics, as opposed to elites, the capacity is denied to autonomously engage in the pursuit of their interests. McAdam aims to react against this tradition of studies, whose origin he traces back in the theories of crowd psychology emphasising the irrationality of collective action (see above ch. 1,

note 2). In order to explain the emergence of the Civil Rights movement, he invokes the self-activity of Black people in mobilising their pre-existing organisational infrastructure and undertaking an activity of cognitive liberation. Macadam proposes to give full recognition to the rationality of popular strata, so to avoid the dichotomy between them and the rational actors who move within institutionalised politics - elites and the interest groups represented in the polity (see 1-3).

McAdam's explanation of the decline of "Black insurgency" is complex. His general argument mentions phenomena such as "oligarchization" and "co-optation" of the leadership as possible causes of the institutionalisation of the social movement and the decline of protest (1982: 55). Tilly has recourse to a vague formulation. He speaks of "the congruence of the conceptions of justice which prevail within" the social movement with "those built into the operation of the polity", as a condition for the "new contender" to "accept and employ the means of acquisition of power the members of the polity prescribe" (1978: 132). It can however be argued that the political process model implies the institutionalisation of the social movement after the opening of the political system, if it assumes the relative position of a group to the political system, as decisive for the emergence of a social movement or of an interest group.

A similar conceptual apparatus is adopted in Pizzorno's work on labour movements in Western Europe. As it was shown in 2-1, Pizzorno theorises about waves of protest, namely historical phases when pluralist regimes are unable to process the

claims put forward by labour action. They are exceptional times, as Pizzorno's theory of pluralist stability wants to show how labour action is normally institutionalised through the procedures of pluralist systems of interest representation. In the same way as Tilly's model entails a transition from social movement to institutions, as soon as the excluded group is admitted into the polity, Pizzorno puts forward a theory of the transition from labour as a social movement to labour as an interest group. In the context of the sociology of protest, Pizzorno makes explicit the link between the definition of the social movement and a theory of order in pluralism which is based on the diffusion of the politics of interests.

As it was seen in 2-1, other works from the pluralist perspective put forward different theories of the institutionalisation of the labour movement. In Lipset and Calhoun labour's transition from radical to institutional politics is explained through the evolution from community to society, from tradition to modernity. For the former the process consists in a cultural change of working people towards universalism and the orientation to achievement. The latter employs the cognate argument that workers develop a positive attitude towards the social change brought about by the emergence of industry. According to Pizzorno (and McAdam), however, the problems of social and political order are not solved by pluralist regimes once and for all. Pizzorno aims to explain the "resurgence of class conflict in Western Europe" at the end of the 1960s. Anyway he endorses the general view of classical pluralism on political order, which is based on the diffusion of the politics of interests in both civil society and the political system. Politics of interests is the only kind of ordinary politics, as it

originates from a modern civil society, where the relations between individuals and groups are ones of competition. Consequently, labour is a social movement, namely it is socially antagonistic only in exceptional circumstances.

The intellectual price Pizzorno has to pay for his allegiance to pluralism is to draw a dichotomy between the emotions of social movements (expressivity) and the rationality of interests (instrumentality) (cf. 1978: 293), or in Weber's terms, between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility. They are not component parts of the same action that can be distinguished analytically. They are historical phases: there are the ordinary times of interest politics and there are cycles of protest, which are times of social movements. He has also to deny rationality to the popular strata who are engaged in social movements, reopening the issue which was McAdam's point of departure. Only for social movements do we have to ignore the subjective meaning protesters attach to their action, and to search for objective processes of which they are unaware.¹⁰ Finally, these processes, albeit frequent in modern societies oriented to innovation and change, bring about exceptional situations, out of which social movements emerge. The possibility is thus ruled out that social movements might emerge out of the normal and ordinary processes of social life, where - as it occurs in workplaces - initiatives of rationalisation are carried out in a context of domination (see 2-2 above). And that workers' resistance may develop into a collective action containing both a logic of interests and a component - what I have

¹⁰ Italian unskilled workers at the end of the Sixties think they are fighting for Socialism, whilst in fact they are constructing a new collective identity, since they have been displaced from the rural South to the industrial North of the country (see 2-1 above).

defined as a logic of social movement - which tends to overcome domination, thus constructing an antagonistic conflict against opponents defined within civil society. *Contra* pluralism, it will be seen in Chapter Five and Six that, firstly, actual mobilisations of modern workers - events of protest included - may only partially be understood according to the logic of interest politics. Secondly, it will be argued - in Chapter Three as well - that the time-spans when a logic of social movement is conveyed within labour action and an antagonistic work conflict is structured, last longer than the times of protest waves.

However, this antagonism which develops within civil society, must be kept analytically distinct from political radicalism. Thus the prevalence of a reformist orientation at the political level cannot exclude the actuality of workers' action following a logic of social movement as well at the level of civil society. In Chapter Six I will show that the prevalence of a reformist orientation within the political wing of the British labour movement can be explained by considering the relative openness of the political system.¹¹ In the words of a comparative historian of the labour movement in Europe: "Repression stimulated working-class radicalism; whilst political relaxation and structures of free collective bargaining encouraged reformism" (Geary 1981: 180). But a component within labour action in Britain which is oriented towards transcending the social order will also be seen, when dealing with the years 1880-1920. As Touraine puts it, "it is possible to distinguish straightforward demands or negotiations from ones influenced by the workers'

¹¹ On this point I follow pluralist scholarship as in Lipset (1983). See Touraine 1988: 141-2.

movement, because the presence of the workers' movement expresses itself in the presence of non-negotiable elements in the negotiations, a general confrontation at the centre of a specific claim. ... At the level of wage demands, action influenced by the workers' movement consists of putting in largely unacceptable claims in order to set those which can be met on a basis of general rejection of the employers' management" (Touraine *et al.* 1987: 25).

In Chapter Five and Six it will be seen that workers' action in its complexity - as carrier both of a logic of social movement and of interests - creates its own institutions, both at the level of civil society and of the political system. It will also be shown that a competition for the leadership of the movement develops at the local and national level between the unions and the political party. This chapter has shown that the process of transition from movement to institutions, from workers acting as a social movement to workers acting as an interest group, is the common theme in the whole pluralist tradition, both in Lipset's and Calhoun's evolutionism and in Pizzorno's cyclical theory. I will consider this broad issue in Chapter Six when dealing with the emergence of Labourism. Labourism will be interpreted, on the one hand, as the prevalence of a logic of interests over the logic of social movement in the policies of the institutions of civil society. On the other hand, it will be characterised as the transformation of the model of antagonistic conflict into defining the perspective of industrial and economic democracy as the horizon for labour action. However, the analysis will also stress the concern showed by labourist union leaders about preserving the autonomy of their institutions and their efforts to devise

alternative economic policies. These features cannot be explained without recognising the presence of a logic of social movement within labour action and the polarisation which it brings about in public debate. Furthermore, it will be seen that processes of self-organisation by popular strata for the pursuit of their interests at the urban and political level occur on the basis of independent organisations and an autonomous discourse which makes reference to labour action. Similarly, they will be related to the emergence of a logic of social movement within labour action and to workers' attempts to structure an antagonistic conflict within civil society

Thus, from the early 1900s, labour action showed the capacity to rally popular strata around itself. In Britain, as in almost any Western European democracy, political parties referring to labour became increasingly relevant in their respective political systems and the labour question was set at centre stage of public debate (Sassoon 1997). The theoretical issue is thus not the meaning that the labour movement takes in the context of a progressive philosophy of history: in Marx's terms, workers' emancipation in the context of human emancipation. It becomes instead the empirical issue of exploring the links which are established between labour action and the formation of wider popular movements and devising suitable analytical concepts for this task.

It is hardly possible to find two more antithetical approaches than pluralist and Marxist accounts of workers' action. Though both make reference to the notion of interests as the linking mechanism between structural conditions and collective

action, Marxists root interests within the mechanism of exploitation inherent in the wage relation, whereas pluralists identify workers' interests, like those of any other stratum, in the context of social stratification.

Pizzorno sees workers' action in Western Europe as pursuing interests within an institutional context that allows groups to exchange resources both at the level of civil society and of the political system. Social antagonism, namely the universalism within labour discourse and the non-negotiable character of its claims, is engendered in the exceptional circumstances of protest waves. Interests, which are formed on the basis of relations of competition in civil society, do not induce antagonistic action but can rather be accommodated within the institutional framework of collective bargaining and the national polity: in ordinary times, workers at most engage in distributive conflicts. Calhoun sees the development of the politics of interests as consequent on workers' adopting an orientation towards change and rationalisation, which distinguishes industry from the previous social and cultural order. For Calhoun and Lipset the issues of social antagonism and political radicalism in labour action belong to the old days of community.

On the contrary, for the research tradition on the labour movement which originated with Marx, the common condition of exploitation engenders action, based on workers' antagonistic interests (class in itself), which to Marx reaches its full maturity with political radicalism (see, for instance, Marx and Engels 1978: 218-9). Burawoy locates his contribution within a tradition of inquiry mainly interested in explaining

the failed transition of workers' social antagonism - *as condition not as action* - to militancy and political radicalism. When he studies one particular factory in the US, he recognises the complexity of workers' action and the field of tension in which it is placed. However, because the unity of the class is pre-given in his account, he concentrates his analysis on the mechanisms preventing the development of militancy, rather than seeing workers' efforts to integrate the different logics of action, and concretely the different workers in the factory, civil society and national politics. In other words, the process of "making" a class by taking interests into account but transcending the limited ambition and integrative potential of the politics of interests.¹² "Marxism was formulated through an examination of the self-activity of capitalism and that starting point has determined its attitude towards the self-activity of the working class" (Price 1982: 205-6).

Furthermore, in Marx's analysis of the mechanised factory, domination is so absolute that there appears to be too wide a gap between the subjection of workers within the labour process and the epoch-making task which his progressive philosophy of history assigns to their struggle. The gap between workers' action at the level of civil society and their revolutionary potential has been a crux for twentieth-century Marxism. Paradoxically, Lenin's analysis of trade unionism is predicated on the same

¹² According to Price, Burawoy's problem is also that "he is dealing with the American working class where the traditions of resistance are almost certainly much weaker than in Britain" (1982: 213, note 33; see also Burawoy 1979: 189). A remark by the early Pizzorno may be added: "the class struggle, though for a certain period was more intense in the United States than in many European countries, ... was geographically limited, and so unable to influence the nation" (1970: 39).

assumption of pluralism, namely that workers' action at the level of civil society is unable to transcend the bounds of their particular interests, falling short of their potentiality as a general class. Mirroring S. Perlman's doctrine of business unionism, workers in civil society, without a revolutionary party, can at most engage in distributive conflicts (see Lipset 1983: 15).

Despite their polar diversity of intent, both Marxist and pluralist studies reach a common conclusion on the full institutionalisation of work conflict in the factory and civil society. Whereas Pizzorno invokes the completion of the process defining a new collective identity, Marxists see cultural hegemony, parliamentary politics, the Welfare State or Burawoy's games of production, as defusing workers' antagonistic and radical potential. Like pluralists such as Calhoun and Lipset, Marxist scholars focus their attention on the possible political radicalism of labour action. Their conflation between social antagonism and political radicalism prevents the possibility of seeing what was special about the early decades of the twentieth century in Britain. Labour action was able to integrate the action of popular strata on the basis of pursuing interests, but also of conceiving an alternative project for society which challenged the industrialists' control on the organisation of work and on investments. These processes at the level of civil society will be seen in Chapter Six to coexist in the actuality of British experience with an option of political reformism which will be explained because of the relative openness of the political system. In Chapter Three my inquiry will reconstruct the emergence, in the first half of the nineteenth century, of antagonistic action among artisans and its links, also in this historical period, with

the development of an autonomous popular movement. Then, in Chapter Four, the decomposition of the artisan model of conflict during the decades 1850s-1880s will be related to the disintegration of the action of popular strata and their loss of political autonomy.

CHAPTER THREE: AN AUTONOMOUS POPULAR MOVEMENT

1 - Class as action

What was defined in the previous chapters as the logic of interests is equivalent to what in Weber's terminology is known as social action flowing from a class situation. Weber in fact designates as a class situation "a specific causal component" of the "life chances" that "a number of people have in common. ... [T]his component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income. ... Always this is the generic connotation of the concept of class: that the kind of chance in the *market* is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate. Class situation is, in this sense, ultimately market situation", either of labour or of commodities (Weber 1978: 927-8; emphasis in the original). Weber makes clear that, according to his definition, " 'classes' are not communities; they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for social action" (ibidem: 927). If we follow Weber's argument, we can see that many discussions about the formation of the British and other national working classes, concern rather what in his terminology would be the formation of status groups, which are indeed, unlike classes, "normally groups" (ibidem: 932).

Historians argue that, in the decades between 1880 and 1920, British workers

developed "an acute awareness ... of their membership in a class, conceived of as a comprehensive corporate group pertaining to both the marketplace and the political arena" (Zolberg 1986: 417). Thus, when Hobsbawm reconstructs this process he focuses his attention on the development of a specific working-class culture, part of which is the emergence of "a single, fairly standardized national pattern of working-class life, and at the same time one increasingly specific to the working class" (Hobsbawm 1984: 204). For instance, "the famous little flat peaked cap, which became the virtual uniform of the British worker at leisure..., appears to have triumphed in the 1890s and 1900s. ... [T]he fish-and-chip shop was invented before 1865 in Lancashire" (ibidem: 186). In those decades, firstly, the class consciousness developed by British workers included "a profound sense of the separateness of manual labour", fostered also by "growing residential segregation" (ibidem: 191 and 204). Secondly, "the most spectacular transformation, of course, was in the pattern of working-class leisure and holidays" (ibidem: 202), such as "football as a mass proletarian sport" and "the typical seaside holiday of the working classes", while the pub represented one of the continuities with previous generations of working people (ibidem: 186-7; 190). When we consider that class consciousness is also characterised, according to Hobsbawm, by "an unformulated but powerful moral code based on solidarity, 'fairness', mutual aid and co-operation" (1984: 191), the affinities between this way of looking at class and Weber's concept of status group become more apparent. In fact, Weber defines a status situation as "every component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*. ... In content, status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else

a specific *style of life* is expected from all who wish to belong to the circle" (Weber 1978: 932; emphases in the original).

At the same time, however, Hobsbawm reminds us that "the world and culture of the working classes is incomprehensible without the labour movement, which for long periods was its core" (Hobsbawm 1984: 178). The British working class's sense of separateness is, however, multi-faceted and ambivalent. On the one hand, when it is oriented inwardly, class consciousness has just been seen to be associated with solidarity, which can be mobilised in resistance and action, protest included. On the other hand, the "group-sense itself"- as Hoggart remarks - can only imply that "the group seeks to conserve, and may impede an inclination in any of its members to make a change, to leave the group, to be different" (quoted in Joyce 1995: 246). By the same token, when it is oriented outwardly, class consciousness can entail a "sense of difference and conflict between 'us' and 'them' " and a "readiness to fight for just treatment" (Hobsbawm 1984: 190-1). But working-class culture may also produce, in different times or individuals, what Hoggart defines as "working-class stoicism", the "fatalism" which, without necessarily renouncing "dignity", is expressed in "the lack in most people of any feeling that some change can, or indeed ought to be made in the general pattern of life" (quoted in Joyce 1995: 247-8).

Furthermore, also non-political manifestations of working-class culture can be convincingly comprehended within a context not only of separateness, but of conflict as well. For instance, "the system of cash betting on horses outside race courses"

which was "technically ... illegal, ... though generally tolerated by the police. ... Like the more organized and political forms of working-class action, it symbolized a sense of class independence, but above all the creation of a social space outside the control of the powerful and the rich" (Hobsbawm 1984: 191). The autonomy of the cultural expression of groups which are in a situation of subordination needs thus to be fought over, like "the emancipation of football from - or rather against - middle and upper class patronage [which] took place in the 1880s, with the triumph of Blackburn against Old Etonians" (ibidem: 202). But not always does an autonomous popular culture give rise to autonomous action, as will be seen, with the support of E.P. Thompson's reconstruction, in the next section dealing with the eighteenth-century "disturbances". Thus Patrick Joyce's distinction between a consciousness or discourse "of class" and a consciousness or discourse of "a class" also seems fruitful (Joyce 1992: 15). While the latter identifies a group according to a certain life-style and code of honour, the consciousness of class as expressed through class action is directly relevant for the definition of a social movement which has been outlined in the previous chapters. In the remainder of this study, reference to popular and working-class culture will be made primarily insofar as it is connected to action.

E.P. Thompson oscillates between these two usages of the term. Thus, on the one hand, "class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression)" (1980: 939). On the other, we define a group of people as class when they "have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways" (ibidem). The

empirical point made in Thompson's seminal work is that action informed with this consciousness would have occurred by the early 1830s, and it is the diachronic process which led to that outcome that he intends to reconstruct (ibidem: 212 and 939). This picture of class, which would then be formed by the time of the mobilisations for Reform and then Chartism, has been questioned in subsequent studies, such as Stedman Jones' on Chartism and then Joyce's on Lancashire in late Victorian years (Stedman Jones 1983; Joyce 1992). Their criticism is not only on empirical grounds, but aims to question the theoretical presuppositions which underpin Thompson's historiography. Taking on board the 'linguistic turn' performed in social theory, Stedman Jones argues against the determination of political discourse by social being which Thompson's account of class would postulate (Stedman Jones 1983: 101). He acknowledges Thompson's emphasis on class as a construct, as the result of agency, as the "process of self-discovery and self-definition" thanks to which "the working class made itself as much as it was made" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 939 and 213). But Thompson also stresses the consistency, which Stedman Jones is unable to downplay in his argument, between the discourse and the action of the artisans on the one hand, and their living, material experience on the other, both in terms of interests - as defined in relation to the market, and of subordination. The relationship between the political programme of Chartism and the social struggles of artisans aimed at preserving or regaining control over their own work and life, will be discussed in sections 6 and 7. However, while *a posteriori* we can explain the emergence of trade unionism through the analytical categories of interests and domination, nothing determined it before its invention by popular creativity.

The more recent attack by Joyce on Thompson's scholarship is premised on a definition of class as a discourse which has recourse to economic categories and presents itself in sectional claims (Joyce 1992: 11). Since both are lacking in the vision of social order endorsed by late Victorian workers in Lancashire, his conclusion is that their discourse would better be characterised as populist (ibidem). Furthermore, Joyce's criticism of the whole of Marxist historiography leaves unclear whether he is only arguing for the irrelevance of class discourse in Britain before the First World War, or his deconstructing the concept of class results in denying that class action has ever actually been developed by the British labour movement (Joyce 1992: 6; 1995: 8). However, one important point of Thompson's scholarship that Joyce neglects, is his argument that the emergence of class action and discourse is an integrative process, as it is able to foster the convergence into common action of people who previously saw their own condition as heterogeneous (cf. E.P. Thompson 1980: 937). Class would then be this movement from the particularity of a situation to the definition of a wider identity; definition which at the same time entails the challenge to the power position of a social group defined as opponent (cf. ibidem: 8-9). Thompson defines class action as upholding a collectivist conception of political economy alternative to *laissez-faire*, which is nourished by the moral economy of popular culture (ibidem: 225; 462-3; 603). His definition is, however, unable to discriminate between the action of working people during the Chartist times and the action of workers during the 20th century (see Hobsbawm 1984: 196 and also ch. 6). In fact, by defining the 18th-century food riots as class struggle before the formation

of a working class ("without class"), this undifferentiated picture extends over an even longer span of time (E.P. Thompson 1993).

In the previous chapters, the social movement was defined as a logic of action, constituting a possible component part of collective action, which produces events, such as a protest wave, or creates corporate groups. In this chapter and the next ones, my attempt is to provide an investigation of this notion - of which in this section I propose a first development -, through analytically reconstructing its articulation within the experience of the British labour movement. To this end I will avail myself - with inevitable selectivity - of the extremely rich bulk of historical studies produced in the last decades. Around the notion of social movement as a logic of action, I will attempt to organise the empirical material as it is provided by historical studies.

This logic of social movement structures a conflict, through which the domination of opponents over a specific set of social relations is contested. It then becomes possible to relate the action of various groups of workers over a certain span of time to a model of conflict, namely to a synchronic unity, insofar as a continuity within the discourse of different groups can be analytically shown in relation to: a) the self-definition of the people involved; b) the identification of opponents at a general level (seeing the opponent in a particular struggle as an instance of an opponent defined in general terms); c) and an overall picture of the desired reconstruction of society which overcomes domination, and is considered as the furthest horizon towards which the participants see their particular struggles as tending. Thus, in Thompson's

definition of the working-class movement given above, (a) the identity of the movement is the self-definition of working people in different trades and industries as members of the class, which by the same token (b) defines their opponents as 'economic men' or capitalists, and (c) a vision of the future social order where the differentiation of economic activity from the ethical relations of the community is prevented or overcome.

This chapter intends to show the relation between this logic of social movement in the action of working people and the actual, complex popular movement which takes shape from the Jacobin mobilisations of the 1790s up to Chartism. In this chapter historical diachrony is seen as the development in time of different empirical component parts of this popular movement: the crowd mobilisation (sect. 2), the struggles of artisans (sect. 3), political Radicalism¹ (sect. 4) and the struggles of communities and factory workers in the North (sect. 5). Chartism will be seen as the wave of protest during which the actual integration of these components was at its highest (sect. 6; see also E.P. Thompson 1980: 937). The time-span almost corresponds to the object of Thompson's 1963 book, and very much draws on the empirical evidence he provides, his narrative and interpretations.

¹I use Radicalism with the capital 'R' to specifically refer to the political discourse which was current in nineteenth-century Britain. It is necessary to distinguish it from the analytical notion of political radicalism that I introduced in the previous chapters, the latter being the less contingent stance of overthrowing the constitutional arrangement. For instance, Russian Bolsheviki would be radical in the second sense of the word, whereas English Radicals might be loyal to the Constitution and thus politically reformist.

Thompson highlights the discontinuity within popular action that marks off the popular movement which begins to take shape with the Jacobin agitations, from the crowd action of the previous decades of the 18th century (that I consider in sect. 2). His narrative also follows the development of a labour identity and how it achieves an increasing relevance within the discourse of the popular movement in a *crescendo* which reaches its apex in the 1830s. Abandoned by its middle-class allies after the "great betrayal" of 1832, workers and popular strata in general acquire an overwhelming predominance within the popular movement. Together with the concomitant polarising of the confrontation against the establishment, this process marks the formation of the first nation-wide movement in history composed almost exclusively of workers (Stedman Jones 1983: 165).

Labour action within this popular movement will be analysed through a model of conflict, whose analytical components will be identified by reconstructing its principles of a) identity, b) opposition and c) totality.² In sect. 7 the relationship will be investigated between the logic of social movement which structures that model of conflict and the political discourse which dominates the popular movement as a whole in its climactic phase of Chartist. Unlike Thompson's interpretation, however, this model of conflict will be sharply distinguished from a different model of conflict - that I would define as properly class conflict -, which begins to be articulated in the last decades of the century (see chs. 5 and 6 below). The years around 1850 mark the exhaustion of the Chartist wave of protest. But if the reason for the rise and defeat of

² I draw the conceptualisation of social movements as articulated according to these dimensions from

Chartism are contingent, the reasons for the decline of that model of conflict are, though empirically less evident, of long-standing effect. As it will be shown in chapter 4, the logic of social movement, as antagonistic struggle within labour action, wanes during the second half of the nineteenth century. Chartists, through their mainly political language, were able to integrate within the same framework of action, more fully than in the previous protest waves of the popular movement, its various empirical components and the different poles of popular culture within which the action of the various popular strata was embedded.

With the decline of the logic of social movement after the defeat of Chartism, the popular movement disintegrates and the action of skilled workers and labourers, together with the poles of popular culture, of which they are the main bearers, are torn apart. 'Respectability' and 'roughness'³ become then subordinated, in political and cultural terms, respectively to Liberal progressivism on the one hand, and Tory paternalism on the other (cf. Stedman Jones 1983: 28 and 36). Popular culture loses its autonomy and neither the action of skilled nor of unskilled workers are any longer able to express a logic of social movement in the decades after 1850. A few decades later, however, reconstituting processes are set in motion, starting with the process of self-organisation of unskilled workers. The diachronic formation of a new popular

Touraine, 1981.

³ For the notion of 'respectability' see sect. 3. For the 'rough' pole of popular culture I intend "a range of cultural responses that were resistant to capitalist imperatives and their corresponding values" (Johnson 1976: 49). Johnson mentions: "resistance to work disciplines, the defence of customary rights of relief, the practices of customary sports and pastimes, the equally traditional use of alcohol in sociability or need, the spending of hard-won wages on petty luxuries, the threat of property or the street

movement will be followed in chapters 5 and 6, where a synchronic analysis will be carried out of the different model of conflict which is structured by workers' action.

The two actual popular movements which emerged in Britain, almost one hundred years apart, were both autonomous and powerful, as in both labour action expressed a logic of social movement. It is tempting, with hindsight, either to see the action of the Chartist artisans as less 'mature' (the conflict structured by artisans was not yet progressive, centred on the factory and so on) or, conversely, to mourn the political radicalism of the Chartist "physical force" wing. However, a consideration of the two models as each being synchronic and internally consistent is necessary. It aims to prevent them from being viewed as situated on a progressive ladder, either in the pluralist sense of the emergence of interest groups out of communities; or in the Marxist version of the formation of a self-conscious political actor, which brings human emancipation by way of a further leap in social evolution (see ch. 2). Thompson aptly intends to rescue "the poor stockinger, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan ... from the enormous condescension of posterity" (1980: 12), but his consideration of the early 19th-century consciousness of the artisan as class consciousness is misleading and leaves room for inroads of deconstructing fury. As Rule puts it, the consciousness of the tradesmen, "because it attempted to retain a frontier between the skilled and the unskilled ... could never develop naturally into a broad-based working class consciousness, ... but it was an historically specific labour consciousness ... which reflected the real experiences of

life of adolescents" (ibidem).

artisans and seemed congruent with their traditional values" (Rule 1987: 118).⁴

2 - Rebellious plebeians

Investigating the antecedents of the autonomous popular action which developed in England from the 1790s, E.P. Thompson has focused his attention on the food riot, as the most typical among the "contentious performances" through which a plebeian culture, constituted in opposition to the gentlemanly society, resisted gentry domination and the intrusion of market mechanisms into their customary dealing with economic matters (1993: in partic. 66; 6-7; 12). In his interpretation, the community riots that repeatedly erupted during the eighteenth and well into the following century, are to be comprehended within a framework of "class struggle", as they are the result of a polarisation between the two cultural worlds of the gentlemen and the "poor" (ibidem: 73).⁵ Such a polarisation was actively created through the development of a vigorous plebeian culture, with its customary way of life and

⁴ Thompson, of course, recognises that "their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience" (1980: 12). The source of his overlapping of the two different models of work conflict seems to me to lie in his view of the principle of totality within the logic of the working-class movement, as the political economy alternative to the free-market ideology, as collectivism versus individualism, whereas I will take the standpoint towards the rationalisation of productive processes as litmus paper for differentiating the two models (see sect. 7 below).

⁵ "The term 'poor' puts together paupers and fiercely-independent yeomen, small peasants, farm servants, rural artisans, and so on, in the same gentry-made category" (E.P. Thompson 1993: 17).

"moral economy" (ibidem: 53 and 85). As a result, "the British people were noted throughout Europe for their turbulence and the people of London astonished foreign visitors by their lack of deference" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 66-7).

According to Thompson, the development of a cultural autonomy, which could be mobilised, "when the price of food rose" in the riots against "middlemen, forestallers, millers", or against toll gates, or, to make another example, to oppose "the enclosure of urban commons", was made possible by the small influence of religious authority on popular life (1993: 43; 63: 50-6). This peculiarity of British history, seen for instance in comparison with Ireland or Southern Europe - France included -, was due to the historical contingency of a previous popular allegiance to Dissent. This had the effect of secularising popular culture, once, during the early-18th century, that the diffusion of Puritanism among the lowest strata of society receded (ibidem: 49-50). One can assume, with Linda Colley, that "the predominantly tory parsons ... in the first half of the eighteenth century ... evoked more respect than hostility", irrespective of an unquestioned decline in church attendance (1982: 153-4; 290). Nevertheless, the thrust of Thompson's argument points to the Church's loss of command over the poor's "feasts and festivals and, with this, over a large area of plebeian culture" (1993: 50). Popular feasts were celebrated according to a secular calendar which had been created by the popular communities themselves, with the guilds playing their part (ibidem: 51-2; 61). The rituals of 'rough music' might also be targeting the landlords (ibidem: 519). Alongside other forms of people's cultural production, "derived from their own experience and resources", they were part of an area of outer

expression which could have "no further objective than to challenge the gentry's hegemonic assurance, strip power of its symbolic mystifications, or even just to blaspheme". However, it included on the one hand the anonymous threat and attack on the property of the gentry, on the other, the riot (ibidem: 87; 75).

Thompson's analysis aims to dispel the picture of English society in the eighteenth century as fully grasped according to a model of paternalism/deference. Even though the logic of popular conflictual action, the "pattern of social protest" (E.P. Thompson 1993: 246) can only be explained by taking into account the relations between the gentry and the 'poor', it is the elements of dynamism within this framework that Thompson wants to stress. The century witnesses a growth of mercantile relations thanks to the development of manufacture and trade; artisans were enjoying a short-lived phase of relative freedom – free from the constraints of the client relationship, but not yet submitted to the work-discipline of industrial labour (ibidem: 37-41). Furthermore, the English gentry was composed of "commercially minded landowners with a sharp eye for profit". Thus the tension within the paternalist framework was accentuated by their efforts at rationalising agricultural activities, with the concomitant attempts to dismiss obligations towards their dependants and to erode people's customary rights ((Plumb 1968: 9; E.P. Thompson 1993: 39).

The power of the King was neither absolute nor legitimated by divine right. "The controlling instruments and images of hegemony are those of the Law and not those of the Church or of monarchical charisma" (Thompson 1993: 9). As a consequence,

"when the people search for legitimations for protest, they often turn back to the paternalist regulations of a more authoritarian society, and select from among these those parts most calculated to defend their present interests - food rioters appeal back to the Book of Orders and to the legislation against forestallors, etc., artisans appeal back to certain parts (e.g. apprenticeship regulations) of the Tudor labour code" (ibidem: 10). In addition, "jealousy of the Crown, seconded by the avarice of the aristocracy, had led to the weakness of all the effective organs for the enforcement of order" (ibidem: 78). The state was then strong in its international projection and efficient in "its fiscal organisation and taxation bureaucracy", but its overall weakness afforded "a fertile soil" on the one hand "to *laissez-faire*", and on the other to the "licence of the crowd" (ibidem: 30; 79). When the state confronted the latter under the guise of the gentlemanly Justices of Peace, the outcomes were not always in line with a repression of popular ebullience. If the target of the crowd had been middlemen as it often was in the case of food riots, the JP might also be interestedly sympathetic with the crowd (ibidem: 74).

At the level of high politics, "the tension between the Crown and the landed elite" had been largely resolved after 1688. "The struggle for primacy became internalised within the landed elite itself and this struggle was mediated by way of the whig and tory alignments. But despite its superficial extremism ... it was a stylised, often ruthless conflict which took place within a social consensus; a manifestation of the confidence and fundamental political unison of England's landed elite" (Colley 1982: 11-2). Plumb's argument that, until the Tory proscription of 1714, "most gentlemen

and a number of freeholders and burgesses" were enabled "to exercise a free political choice" (Plumb 1968: 2-3), is contested by Colley, who argues that already in the 1690s "tiny boroughs" were "beginning to succumb to affluent, absentee candidates in preference to indigenous minor gentry or merchants" (1982: 18). Historians however agree that the Whig oligarchy, which lasted until 1760, brought about a restriction of participation in parliamentary politics, which was sanctioned by the Septennial Act of 1716 and the Last Determination Act of 1729 (Plumb 1968: 5 and 7). But it remained as an ideal which could be employed in public discourse, the "image of a social order composed of independent landed men - whether gentry in Parliament or sturdy freeholders in the constituencies - whose active participation in the polity, in both a political and military capacity, sustained political 'virtue' and kept back the terrible spectre of corruption" (Brewer 1980: 324). Despite the fact that "if Whigs were predators, then Tories were predators too" (E.P. Thompson 1993: 30), the proscribed Tory party exploited the resentment over corruption and the system of patronage, "which Walpole and Co. certainly systematised to an unprecedented degree, but which had proved ... [its] efficacy before 1715" (Colley 1982: 30).

In eighteenth-century England, "rentals might be jacked up by keen stewardship and improving agriculture, but they offered no windfall gains as did sinecure, office, commercial speculation or fortunate marriage. Political influence could do more to maximize profits than could four-course rotation" (E.P. Thompson 1993: 26). And if "victory in high politics was followed by the spoils of war, just as victory in war was often followed by the spoils of politics", both were an expensive business and

plebeian strata had to pay a disproportionate price for them. "Between 1715 and 1760 British government derived an estimated 72 per cent of tax revenue from indirect taxes. Excises were levied on soap, candles, leather, malt, salt and tea..." (Colley 1982: 157). The political state of the nation was resented, increasingly after 1760, by the rising strata of professionals, tradesmen and bankers of the City, the latter becoming "a hotbed of Country opposition to the Whig hegemony" (Brewer 1980: 342).⁶ In the decades of its proscription, the Tory Party had made inroads into "the great commercial cities of London, Norwich, Coventry, Newcastle and Bristol, and in the expanding, though unrepresented industrial towns, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds" (Colley 1982: 152). The Tory Party did not undergo a mutation; it just "combined a longstanding and popular suspicion for the executive with a rooted inclination towards a stratified, stable, society where land determined political responsibility" (ibidem: 173). It did however intercept a process of self-activation of the 'middling sorts', which both the existence of "forty provincial newspapers ... in all the major towns of England" by 1760 (Plumb: 11) and the formation of the first voluntary organisations on a political basis testify.⁷

⁶ On the expansion of the 'middling sorts' see Brewer 1980: 333; these strata were pushing for the rationalisation of the state against the intermingling of aristocratic privilege and political bribery. The *Wilkite Middlesex Journal* was exposing the abuses of a system, which for instance enabled the aristocratic customer to refuse the payment of his debt, or "the triumph of favoritism over talent in many different spheres of employment". The "stock-jobber and speculator were hated ... because it was thought - often with good reason - that their machinations provoked the honest tradesman's downfall" (ibidem: 346-51; 335-9).

⁷ On the flourishing of voluntary associations in eighteenth-century England see Brewer 1980: 157-161; see also Colley 1982: 163-5.

London crowds did impinge "upon high politics at a score of critical occasions. ... The calendar of political anniversaries and celebrations - processions, illuminations, elections, effigy burning, carnivalesque ebullitions - all allocated roles to the crowd and enlisted its participation. ... The unpopular minister, the popular politician needed the aid of no pollster to know their rating with the crowd; they might be pelted with obscenities or chaired in triumph through the streets. When the condemned trod the stage at Tyburn, the audience proclaimed vociferously their assent or dissent with disgust" (E.P. Thompson 1993: 57; 95; 67). But neither in these cases nor in the food riots was the crowd able to present itself as an autonomous actor, either at the level of the emerging civil society or at the level of politics. The crowd was more than often used by the factions within the elite for their own private feuds (see, for instance, *ibidem*: 91). In the four-and-half decades of Whig oligarchy, the "Tory tradition of paternalism, which looks backward to the Stuart 'Book of Sports', and which extends ... a warm permissiveness to the recreations of the people" consolidates and will remain "extremely vigorous" well into the following century (*ibidem*: 12; 76; see also 4-4 below).

In the absence of autonomously developed discourse and self-organisation, "opportunity is grabbed as the occasion arises, with little thought of the consequences". The crowd "imposes its power in moments of insurgent direct action, knowing that its moment of triumph will last for only a week or day" (E.P. Thompson 1993: 13). Even though English plebeian culture is not fatalistic, "the larger outlines of power, station in life, political authority appear to be as inevitable and irreversible

as the earth and the sky" (ibidem: 12; 43). The gentry had periodically to re-assert or re-negotiate the terms of its domination. "Even 'liberality' and 'charity' may be seen as calculated acts of class appeasement in time of dearth and calculated extortions (under threat of riot) by the crowd; what is (from above) an 'act of giving' is (from below) 'an act of getting' " (ibidem: 72). However, "the plebeian culture is, in the end, constrained within the parameters of gentry hegemony". No utopia of a society emancipated from domination is conceived of, no strategy for achieving it is debated. The aim of the riot is often to recall "the gentry to their paternalist duties". "There is in any case ... any sense that the social order as a whole was endangered; what was feared was local 'anarchy', the loss of prestige and hegemony in the locality, relaxing social discipline" (ibidem: 73; 83; 85 and 81).

What Thompson defines as "the cultural hegemony of the gentry" pervades all society until at least the 1760s: "many who earned their wealth in urban, commercial occupations still sought to translate ... [it] into gentry status" by purchasing land (1993: 16; see also ibidem: 33 and 90, note 2). Popular strata did not take part in the process that Habermas has defined as the creation of a "political public sphere" (Habermas 1989; Eley 1992). As has been hinted above, an infrastructure of written communication and permanent voluntary organisations thickens in the decades after 1760, which also witness both the crowd and the middle-class Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights supporting Wilkes' Radicalism, after "George III's admission ... brought Tory readmission to the hierarchies of Court, civil service and county" (Brewer 1980: 331, Colley 1982: 291-2 and 160). Popular culture will not, however,

have made its presence felt within the *Oeffentlichkeit* before the early decades of the nineteenth century, when it develops its own reading and debating public, press, organisations and leaders (E.P. Thompson 1980: 799).⁸ "When the ideological break with paternalism came, in the 1790s, it came in the first place less from the plebeian culture than from the intellectual culture of the dissenting middle class, and from thence it was carried to the urban artisans. But Paineite ideas, carried through by such artisans to an even wider plebeian culture, instantly struck root there; and perhaps the shelter provided by this independent and robust culture enabled them to flourish and to propagate themselves, until they gave rise to the great and undifferentiated agitations at the end of the French Wars" (E.P. Thompson 1993: 86).⁹ The following sections try to reconstruct the process of 'making' this autonomous popular movement, which started in the decade after the outburst of the French Revolution and culminated in Chartism. In the next three sections my exposition will be concerned with the main empirical components of the popular movement, beginning with the artisans.

⁸ For a provincial account of the early, "dawning" self-organisation of popular strata, within the context of the formation of "public opinion" as a permanent phenomenon, see Money 1971.

⁹ "Under the influence of radical propaganda and activism" food riots changed their "spirit and form". In North-Western England, by the end of the eighteenth century they "had become increasingly planned and advertised. ... Henceforth the food riot became an integrated part of a wider conception of

3 - The emergence of a labour identity

Unionism among tradesmen can be traced back to the beginning of the eighteenth century. Even though historians have found it impossible to count the exact number of industrial disputes, it has been possible to enumerate more than three hundred between 1717 and 1800. These were not necessarily linked to the existence of a formal organisation; evidence, however, "supports the existence of at least fifty trade unions before 1800 among a variety of skilled trades", the most ancient being found among the woollen-weavers, the woolcombers and the tailors (Rule 1986: 256).

The creation of organisations based on common membership of a trade draws its roots from the longer tradition of the Guilds of masters and master-craftsmen, which was still vital at the beginning of the 19th century, for instance in the great jubilee celebration of the Preston Guilds, where "the nobility, gentry, merchants, shopkeepers, and manufacturers all took part" in a week of processions and exhibitions organised by the journeymen; or in 1825 Bradford (E.P. Thompson 1980: 464-5). The collective action of artisans, which could also develop in the absence of a permanent organisation (Rule 1986: 256), was nurtured by the solidarities constructed within the workshop. As Behagg puts it: "Of course, we may see the formal trade union as part of a wider phenomenon whereby work-groups evolved less-formalized trade associations. At the same time, however, this kind of activity, the 'ad hoc

working-class protest" (Booth 1977: 106-7).

strike', wage demand, or riot, was arguably the most explosive and visible manifestation of a broader set of largely implicit rules by which the work-group related to one another at the point of production" (1992: 122).

In his study, which is devoted to Birmingham artisans and popular politics during the early nineteenth century, Behagg argues that "the abiding belief at the heart of workplace organization was that the employer's appropriate role was to initiate the process of production and to market the finished product. What came between (the nature and pace of production) was properly the responsibility of labour. ... Workers were expected to be left to organize themselves by operating in work-groups called 'gangs', 'crews', 'sets', 'shops' or 'chairs', according to the trade, each with its own inherent hierarchy. The agreed head of each group negotiated for work with the employer and ensured its equitable distribution within the group" (Behagg 1992: 127).

As far as the rhythm of production is concerned, E.P. Thompson has noted "the characteristic irregularity of labour patterns before the coming of large-scale machine-powered industry. Within the general demands of the week's or fortnight's task - the piece of cloth, so many nails or pairs of shoes - the working day may be lengthened or shortened. Moreover, in the early development of manufacturing industry, and of mining, many mixed occupations survived" (1993: 371), like for instance the Pennine small-farmer/weaver. Within this work pattern, which "was one of alternate bouts and intense labour idleness", tradesmen used to abstain from work

on Mondays (on the custom of the so-called St. Monday, see E.P. Thompson 1993: 371-7 and Behagg 1992: 123).

As far as the performance of the task is concerned, in "a time when there was little schooling, and neither the Mechanics' Institutes nor Technical Colleges ... almost the entire skill or 'mystery' of the trade was conveyed by precept and example in the workshop, by the journeyman to his apprentice. The artisans regarded this 'mystery' as their *property*, and asserted their unquestionable right to 'their quiet and exclusive use and enjoyment of their ... arts and trades'" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 279; emphasis in the original). "It has been calculated that by the end of the eighteenth century only five or six per cent of the working-class population of London, by far England's largest centre of artisanal production,¹⁰ were self-employed" (Rule 1987: 102). The process of proletarianisation, however, did not prevent the craftsman from developing a positive identification with his work. "A skilled man could often recognise his own work and describe it as 'his' work even when it had been alienated from him by sale. This hidden form of property, an element of continuing 'possessive creation' is missed by a concept of property limited to a notion of alienated material rights, yet it describes the property that skill invents" (ibidem: 104). "There were significant manufacturing towns and regions, notably the metal trades of Birmingham and Sheffield where specialised small-workshop production allowed a rather small ratio of master to men to persist. ... Some occupations with low capital cost still allowed the traditional mobility from apprentice to journeyman to master. In the building

¹⁰ Indeed, London was "the greatest artisanal centre in the world" (Thompson 1980: 259).

trades men could move then, as they do today, from taking on contracts to working for wages as opportunities or needs dictated." (ibidem: 102).

Apprenticeship is the key issue that defines the relationship of the artisan with his fellow men, with the other wage earners and with the employers. The very self-definition and the social recognition of being 'journeyman' or the more restrictive 'mechanic' (see Prothero 1979: pp. 4-5) depended on having served an apprenticeship. "In some trades there were seven years of formal indentured service. In others there were accepted equivalents, for example serving seven years with one's father could mean acceptance as a 'legal workman'. Levels of formality varied from trade to trade with rural trades tending to be less rigid than urban ones" (Rule 1987: 100). "The level of skill required and a seven-year learning period needed for their effective practice, were real barriers to entry for some crafts. But in many (according to Adam Smith in most) apprenticeship was insisted upon primarily as a means of restricting entry to occupations capable of being learned in less than seven years. The object was to prevent 'overstocking'. ... In effect unions of skilled workers struggled to preserve and control apprenticeship as a functional equivalent of the modern 'closed shop': collective action increasingly replaced regulation by state or corporation as the means of restricting entry" (ibidem: 101).

Until their repeal in 1824, the Combination Laws of 1799 and 1800 denied the legal possibility of trade unionism; a move which was also originated by the will to crush

the Jacobin agitation and the threat to political power that it implied.¹¹ However, according to Rule, "of all the events which took place while the Combination Laws were in force, none was more threatening to the effectiveness of skilled worker trade unionism than the repeal in 1814 of the statutory requirements for a seven-year apprenticeship before a skilled craft could be exercised" (1986: 276). The repeal of these clauses of the 250 year-old V Elizabeth was part of a more general process by which political power intended to remove the barriers towards the transformation of production as well as to strengthen the position of the entrepreneurs in the ensuing struggle with the artisan workers. At the same time as seeking the favour of the great magnates and the gentry by the enactment of the Corn Laws in 1815, political power "swept away the entire paternalist code in the space of ten years", included those clauses of the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers which "were empowering magistrates to enforce a minimum wage ... (The clause under which it was an offence to leave work unfinished, however, remained)" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 595-6).

"The confinement of knowledge of skills and work practices to those who have served apprenticeships" (Rule 1987: 100) implied for the young apprentice a process of socialisation in a world which was preserved "opaque" to the outsider, not only during the time when the legality of trade organisation was explicitly denied (Behagg 1992: 124). "Special clothes such as the mason's leather apron and the ownership of

¹¹ In Thompson's judgement, in this historical juncture, English peculiarity in comparison with France was to weld the alliance between manufacturers and those social groups who were interested in the maintenance of the political status quo (1980: 195).

the proper tools" indicated the possession of the skill, whereas "participation in ceremonies reinforced it" (Rule 1987: 104). Rites of passage were celebrated with communitarian drinking (Rule 1986: 326-7). In Birmingham "drinking patterns within the working community were traditionally defined in occupational terms", with the members of the various trades meeting in pubs of different rank, according to their relative prestige (Behagg 1992: 134). The continuity between the workplace and the public house, between work and leisure time, can also be inferred from the practice of carrying out in the pub the measures of punishment or intimidation against those fellow-workers who had infringed the rules of the trade (*ibidem*: 134-5); while "deliberate and serious annoyance" was the penalty inflicted within the workshop (Rule 1986: 328).

The issue of apprenticeship was thus pivotal in the conflict between tradesmen and an emerging pool of economic agents oriented to change customary work practices. "Technology was simply one element in a broad spectrum of innovation designed to increase output and lower costs. Thus, general contracting in the building trades, sweating in the tailoring trades, deskilling in the shoe trade, and mechanization in a host of others, all acted to reduce the power of labour to control and influence the labour process" (Behagg 1992: 5). The resistance of artisans thus aimed on the one hand to defend their wages (or price-lists), and on the other to keep their mastery of the production process. "The story of apprenticeship control is not one of grand confrontation as much as running skirmishes: locally won or held here by this group of craftsmen, lost there by that group" (Rule 1986: 324). Indeed, each of the above

mentioned innovation strategies was intended to foster the encroachment of unskilled labour upon the reserve territory of the trade, with the double purpose of reducing costs and acquiring control over the labour process. On the one hand, wages, in the absence of formal or informal combination of workers based upon the trade and apprenticeship, were made dependent on individual bargaining, while at the same time the capital holder had increased his market power,¹² given that labour supply had been widened.¹³ On the other hand, a labour process engulfed by juvenile, female and generally non-trade workforce allowed a further restructuring of the labour process to be imposed without the friction of customary trade practices (see also E.P. Thompson 1980: 274). Rule stresses the antagonistic character of this conflict: "no account of the rise of craft unionism in Britain which fails to see that the apprenticeship issue was a fundamental divide between the skilled trade unionists and their employers, whatever degree of 'accommodation' to the imperatives of the labour market might have been made, can come close to an understanding of the period" (1986: 322).

The defence of the trade was then conducted not only for economic reasons (see also Rule 1985 for a European comparison). The relative freedom enjoyed by the skilled artisan fostered his sense of independence and pride. For instance, while all working people, according to E.P. Thompson, "attached an exceptional valuation to the

¹² In order to reduce the pressure on the labour market, the trades also utilised the 'tramping system', most widely between around 1790 and 1840 (see Hobsbawm 1968: 34-63).

¹³ In a number of trades, after "the artisans had lost their struggle to prevent the ending of statutory apprenticeship in 1814, ... the hold of the organised skilled men was becoming confined to a shrinking 'bespoke' end, while unorganised pieceworkers swelled the 'sweated' ranks supplying the ready-made

ceremony of funeral [and] a pauper funeral was the ultimate social disgrace" (1980: 458, note 1), for the artisans funeral processions were a form of "public display" (Rule 1986: 327). "The clear message of the trade funeral, irrespective of the way the actual detail of the mummery varied from area to area, or between village and town, was that the individual who respected collective values was, in turn, deserving of collective respect" (Behagg 1992: 132). Thompson associates the growth of a sense of respectability within working-class culture to the rise of friendly societies, through which "small tradesmen, artisans, labourers, all sought to insure themselves against sickness, unemployment, or funeral expenses"¹⁴.... But the discipline essential for the safe-keeping of funds, the orderly conduct of meetings and the determination of disputed cases, involved an effort of self-discipline as great as the new disciplines of work. An examination of rules and orders of friendly societies in Newcastle and district during the Napoleonic Wars gives us a list of fines and penalties more exacting than those of a Bolton cotton-master" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 458). The offences include "being drunk on the Sabbath, ... coming into the clubroom in liquor, taking God's name in vain, or ... disclosing secrets outside the society" (ibidem).

Behagg, who in the wake of Thompson, intends to assert the class character of artisans' action, stresses how improper it is to argue for a working-class culture divided between 'respectable' and 'rough' behaviour. If we consider the attitude

sector" (Rule 1986: 268).

¹⁴ "At Newcastle, as at Sheffield, it is possible that after the Two Acts the formation of friendly societies was used as a cover for Jacobin organization" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 459). For Birmingham, see Behagg 1992: 110.

towards drinking as a discriminating issue between these two poles of British working-class experience (see McClelland 1987: 207), Rule reminds us that the money exacted for "minor breaches of working customs, such as swearing and fighting ... was being used to buy drink" (1986: 326); and Behagg insists on the impermeability of the working community *loci*, such as the workshop and the public house, to the intrusion of moral reformers of religious and middle-class origin. Nevertheless, to mark its distance from the besieging unskilled labour, the language of the trade employed the term of 'honourable', with its contrary being used both for those masters who betrayed the solidarity of the trade and became entrepreneurs, and for unskilled labour employed in tasks which were traditionally reserved to craftsmen. As Thompson makes clear, in the early Thirties "the unskilled massed in London inhabited another world from that of the artisans - a world of extreme hardship, illiteracy, very widespread demoralization, and disease..." (1980: 895).

The transition from a trade to a wider labour identity is, in Thompson's reconstruction, one of the diachronic processes leading the formation, at the beginning of the 1830s, of the English working class. The existence of the barrier, however, among the journeymen organised in trade unions and the mass of poor labourers, is a strong point against the case for defining this labour identity, as it was being formed in these decades, as class consciousness. In the last chapter of his seminal book Thompson reconstructs the processes, both within the experiences of self-organisation and in terms of ideational elaboration, which led to the agitations around the 1832 Reform Bill, and then to the Chartist wave of protest from the end of

the 1830s to the end of the 1840s. As far as ideological production is concerned, Thompson considers the contribution from leaders or editors of the popular press, or anyway intellectuals whose ideas were adopted by the leaders and the working people, and propagated through the means of communication of the popular movement. It is within this popular movement, which in the agitations of the 1830s and 1840s found its level of highest integration, that a labour identity, wider than that of the single trade, emerged. John Gast, who in 1812 had taken a leading part in the formation of the London shipwrights' benefit society, and in 1818 was involved in the attempts at general and national unionism of the Philanthropic Hercules (in London and Manchester), was one of the main characters within this process, at least in the capital city.

"As a shipwright Gast belonged to one of the oldest, most skilled and most prestigious crafts in England, whose value could not be questioned. His and the other mechanics' respectability derived from occupations that were honourable, honourable because they were of value to the community, because they demanded the possession of skills acquired through training, and because they enabled men to maintain themselves and their family by their labour at a decent social level, above subsistence and with sufficient leisure to engage in respectable activities. This situation supported a level of independence, both at work and in running their own clubs without interference from above. Such a position was achieved without recourse to unrespectable means, such as thieving or prostitution, or to charity, whether in working life or old age. Many of these artisans aspired to the position of master, foreman or dealer, as did Gast himself, but all were clearly distinguished from the mass of the poor, who did not maintain themselves at a respectable level by honourable labour. Gast and his fellows never forgot this distinction or ceased to regard the mechanics as a much more useful part of the population. And since many of the means of maintaining this respectability lay in individual ability, effort, skill, thrift, foresight and control of drinking, a critical attitude to those who failed to do so, was natural"

(Prothero 1979: 328).

4 - Political Radicalism

In the artisan centres such as London, the convergence between political Radicalism and trade unionism had been accomplished by the early 1820s. In 1822 Gast welcomed to London the Radical leader Henry Hunt, released from jail, on behalf of "The Committee of the Useful Classes". Five years earlier, on the contrary, the committee which prepared his entry in London had been composed in the main by Jacobins unconnected to the trade union movement (E.P. Thompson 1980: 852). "In Sheffield it was said that 'every cutler' had a copy" of Paine's *Rights of Man*, and the Sheffield Corresponding Society, whose existence preceded its London counterpart, "was from its inception based on 'the inferior sort of Manufacturers & Workmen' in the cutlery industry" (ibidem: 117, 22 and 166). The tradition of political Radicalism, rejuvenated by the 1792 publication of Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man*, had already been combined with the older British tradition of religious Dissent, as for instance in Norwich, which became "the leading provincial centre of Jacobinism" (ibidem: 131). This confluence between the Jacobin, the Dissenting and the trade union traditions was to form the rationalist pole of the popular movement. This can be seen both in the theme of individual self-improvement, which was present in the Dissenting and trade discourses as well,¹⁵ and in the Paineite argument about the prevalence of reason over

¹⁵ Referring to the Radical artisans, Thompson argues: "the keynote of the autodidact culture of the Twenties and early Thirties was moral sobriety. ... The Puritan character-structure underlies the moral earnestness and self-discipline which enabled men to work on candle-light after a day of labour"

the Established religion and traditional accounts of political power legitimacy (see *ibidem*: 103-7).

The anti-religious strand of the rationalist argument evolved in the 1820s from free-thinking to atheism in Carlile, but it was never to gain prevalence within the popular movement. However, one of the latter's great themes was the battle for the freedom of press, which found in Carlile its untiring champion, and then developed into the campaign for the unstamped press in the first half of the 1830s (E.P. Thompson 1980: 796 and 791). The rationalist tradition as a whole gave the popular movement its institutional devices: on the one hand, the political corresponding society with its national impulse and with a tendency - expressly stated in 1792 by the London Corresponding Society -, of gathering in public debate 'members unlimited'; on the other the benefit society and the trade union, restricted in their enrolment but rooted in the materiality of the life of civil society, at both the level of interests and of the control of the work process. The Radical tradition, which in its pure formulation was denying the desirability of combinations (see Rule 1987: 110), came to be modified under the influence of trade unionism. The London-based *Trades Newspaper* played an important part in this respect. But trade unionism, thereby achieving a voice in public debate, performed another task that was decisive for giving ideational autonomy to the popular movement as a whole, *vis-à-vis* the equally rationalist middle-class reformers. Since its first editorial in 1825, the *Trades Newspaper* critically attacked utilitarian political economy, especially since the latter had

(1980: 811).

endorsed Malthusian explanations of unemployment and was advocating cognate policies, gaining some influence within the movement - thanks mainly to Francis Place (E.P. Thompson 1980: 854-855; Prothero 1979: 185).

The political debate within the popular movement polarised into, on the one hand, the Painite argument for people's sovereignty, according to which the aim of the movement was to redesign the Constitution of the country on the basis of reason; and on the other, the theme of the ancient Constitution and the tradition of the "Free-Born Englishman", which was making reference to a "pristine state of liberty supposedly enjoyed by the British during Saxon rule" and then coerced by political power since the Norman conquest (Parssinen 1973: 505 and 508, note 1).¹⁶ However, both strands of the Radical argument were unified within the popular movement through the common opposition to the regime of "Old Corruption", namely the monopoly of legislative power in the hands of Whigs and Tories, and the support it gave to landed interests, financial speculation and employers - insofar as the latter's opponent was labour - (see also Prothero 1974: 141-2). The Radical argument itself was embedded in a wider consensus, which extended across the whole range of the political spectrum, over the opposition to an enlargement of the powers of the state, that Thompson shows with reference to the issue, raised in 1818, of creating a national police. "Tories feared the over-ruling of parochial and chartered rights, and of the power of the local J.P.s; Whigs feared an increase in the power of Crown or of Government; Radicals like Cartwright and Burdett preferred the notion of voluntary

¹⁶ On the powerful historical roots of this tradition in the previous centuries. see Hill 1958.

associations of citizens or rotas of householders; the radical populace until Chartist times saw in any police an engine of oppression" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 89). One of the great themes of the Radical movement, shared by Constitutionalists and Republicans alike, was the critique of the burden of taxation. If, among the former, Cobbett, echoed by 'Orator' Hunt on the hustings, inveighed in 1816 against 'the enormous amount of the taxes, which the Government compels us to pay for the support of its army, its placemen, its pensioners & for the payment of the interests for its debt' (quoted in *ibidem*: 660), the Jacobin Paine was advocating the "abolition of government: 'the instant formal Government is abolished, society begins to act' " (*ibidem*: 101).

In the debate which followed the massacre of Peterloo in 1819 (cf. 3-5 below), the long-standing controversy came to the fore, instituting a split within the Radical movement over perspectives for popular action (Belchem 1981). The manufacturing district around Manchester unlike the artisan centres of London and Birmingham dealt with in the previous section, represents the scenario here. The controversy among the leadership of the popular movement in 1819 was indeed around the alternative between reforming the present House of Commons so as to allow the representation of the excluded masses, or calling for a national convention with its possible - expressly stated - republican implications (*ibidem*).¹⁷ Thompson (1968)

¹⁷ National conventions were intended within the movement either as a temporary means of pressure, in the occasion of presenting petitions to parliament for political reform, or as "a rival authority to Parliament, an alternative, an anti-Parliament..." (Prothero 1974: 134; see also Parssinen 1973).

highlights the decisive contribution of Paine in allowing the popular movement to overcome the discourse of deference permeating popular protest in the eighteenth century, for instance in the food riots or in the reliance on members of the elites as supporters of the people's cause. By the same token, however, Paine's teaching was on its own unable to sustain a strong, autonomous movement as the one which developed in England during the first half of the nineteenth century, especially given the twist that his followers, such as Carlile and Brayshaw, impressed upon his legacy.

Carlile and Brayshaw, in their advocacy of orthodox Painism, repudiated any form of popular organisation, mechanically relying on the power of reason in persuading individuals. 'As the political principles laid down by Thomas Paine are well understood by the great body of people, every thing that is necessary to put them in practice, will suggest itself' (Carlile quoted in Belchem 1981: 22). The necessity of mass mobilisation was instead advocated by Hunt, who maintained universal suffrage as the claim of a "'constitutional' protest for a 'constitutional' programme" (ibidem: 5). Moreover, it would be wrong to equate this dilemma within the movement's debate with the issue of the use of violence.¹⁸ This can be seen both in the previous quotation from Carlile, which was uttered in the context of explaining why he did not

¹⁸Mass mobilisation did not directly aim at violence. "Nearly all extreme radicals expected violence only to occur if the oppressors resorted to it" (Prothero 1974: 163). "Peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must" was their tactical choice. "The people must unite and demand their rights, and it was then up to the oppressors whether they would gain them peacefully or violently" (ibidem). An alternative strategic path which was discussed in minority circles within the popular movement, was conspiracy (see McCalman 1987: 318), like for instance the plans for assassinating ministers in order to provoke a mass arousal (cf. also Prothero 1979: 127-31).

advocate physical force during the 1819-20 confrontation; and in Cobbett's argument of the right to resist oppression, 'established by the law and usages of England' (quoted in E.P. Thompson 1980: 684). Indeed, this tradition of popular constitutionalism was not more accommodative than Paineite republicanism, since it regarded the present struggle as continuous with those periods of English history when the people had fought for their liberties against absolutism (Belchem 1981: 9-10).

Obsessed with Paineite purity, the Carlile-Brayshaw line of argument slipped into sectarianism with its denial of any organisational endeavour. Indeed, the controversy between rationalism and historicism was sometimes to create splits in provincial centres, but the two poles more often co-existed within the popular movement (Belchem 1981: 29, note 60; see also Epstein 1989: 84-6). At other times provincial societies and leaders of the movement appeared to ignore doctrinaire distinctions, advocating both traditions which were making reference to either reason or historical precedent (Belchem 1981: 8 and 29; E.P. Thompson 1980: 741; Prothero 1974: 136 and 141). Indeed, Chartist organisations and agitation assumed both Paine and Hunt as their points of reference (Belchem: 1981: 32).¹⁹

As early as 1776, Major Cartwright had formulated the political programme which lies at the centre of the popular movement up to Chartism: "annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, payment for Members, and adult manhood suffrage". His argument was developed with exclusive "reference to Saxon precedent" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 91). The strand of popular constitutionalism was to re-assert its

¹⁹ Feargus O' Connor, however, developed his awareness of the necessity for an organisational effort as continuous with Hunt's position (see Belchem 1981: 26).

prevalence within the Radical movement after the Jacobins' delusions with Bonapartism, thus preventing the articulation of national sentiments²⁰ from being monopolised by the loyalist 'Church and King' mobs (ibidem: 133, 125, 85, 82; Epstein 1989: 90-1). Moreover, it offered opportunities for ideological development towards democratic Radicalism to a tendency within Toryism, which was criticising the transformation of production techniques in the northern textile industry.

5 - The Northern Communities

"Lancashire was arguably the most significant of English manufacturing counties" (Rule 1986: 274). Among cotton workers a sharp distinction is to be drawn between, on the one hand, factory cotton spinners and, on the other, outworking hand-loom weavers. "Although cotton spinners can be regarded as the first group of factory workers to organise, they hardly represent a precocious new development, for in most respects other than in their working environment they resembled craft workers and their unionism was much in the traditional style of skilled workers. ... High entry fees in the early nineteenth century reveal the elite nature of spinners' unions" (ibidem:

²⁰ "The rhetoric of patriotism was one to which appeal was as likely to be made by the Government and its supporters as by the opposition. More accurately there occurred in the 18th century, and ... for much of the 19th century, a dispute as to whether it was the Government or its opponents which could most rightly claim the label 'patriot' " (Cunningham 1981: 11). According to Colley, "only after the 1870s did Britain's governing elite commit itself to a patriotic, blatantly nationalist appeal" (1986:

270). In 1818 Manchester mule spinners both produced "one of the major confrontations of the period of the Combination Acts" (*ibidem*: 271) and were involved, along with London artisans, in the already-mentioned early attempts at general unionism (Prothero 1979: 100-102). Nevertheless, they did not occupy a central position in Manchester political movement: "no cotton-spinner or mill-hand features among the local Radical leadership" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 706). Though "most of the cotton spinners were Radicals, ... the authorities feared no spinners' rising or march on London" (*ibidem*: 707). A higher degree of integration with the other components of the popular movement was to be established ten years later. Under John Doherty's leadership, short-lived attempts were made at creating an association called Operative Spinners of England, Ireland and Scotland and, on that basis, an inter-trade National Association for the Protection of Labour, which lasted from 1829 to 1832 (*ibidem*: 876; Sykes 1982: 155). But for the time being, "the main channel for the energy of the factory workers of 1816-20 was within their own trade union organization" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 707).

In their turn, in the 1820s "cotton handloom weavers were probably still the largest single grouping of any specialised group" (Rule 1986: 3) in manufacturing. "Weavers were, and had probably been for some hundred years, the largest single group of industrial workers in England. ... At any time between 1820 and 1840 they came third in the occupational lists, after agricultural labourers and domestic servants, and greatly exceeding any other industrial group" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 344). The

117; see also *ibidem*: 109 and 112-3 and Cunningham 1981: 17).

decline of the cotton handloom weavers - an expression that, according to Thompson, risks underrating "the scale of the tragedy which was enacted" (ibidem: 321), occurred through a two-phase process, only the second being properly due to mechanisation. Actually, in a previous time hand-loom weavers "had multiplied as a consequence of the early mechanisation of spinning" (Rule 1986: 36; E.P. Thompson 1980: 288). A contemporary commentator noted that "the fifteen years between 1788 and 1803 ... marked 'the golden age of the great trade' for the weaving communities" in the uplands surrounding Manchester, with immigrants being attracted in their thousands" from the 1770s (E.P. Thompson 1980: 304). The deterioration of the handloomers' economic condition and status shows the fate which any trade was to expect, in case it had lost control of its labour market. In the eighteenth century the weaver might either have been a superior artisan, working as self-employed for a choice of master, or a journeyman weaver, employed by a single master either in the latter's shop "or, more commonly, at his home"; or still a part-time farmer or smallholder (ibidem: 299). By the 1830s his earnings had decreased by 80% in comparison with those late years of the previous century when the labour market was tight (Rule 1986: 37). Wage cutting followed overstocking of the trade which had been allowed by the breakdown of custom and trade union protection (E.P. Thompson 1980: 328). It is at this point that the power-loom completed the job.²¹

²¹ See E.P. Thompson 1980: 327, note 2 and Rule 1986: 10 and 37 for data concerning the magnitude and rapidity of the processes of reduction of handloom and their weavers, and increase in power-looms and factory work-force, "predominantly women and children". Cf. also Rule 1986: 10 for data concerning the dimension of Manchester cotton firms by the early Thirties.

"The weavers' first demand, from 1790s onwards, was for a legal minimum wage - a demand supported by some employers, as a means of enforcing fair conditions of competition upon their less scrupulous rivals. The rejection of this demand by the House of Commons in May 1808, was followed by a strike, when 10,000 to 15,000 weavers demonstrated on successive days in St. George's Fields, Manchester. The demonstration was dispersed by the magistrates with bloodshed" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 307). Unheard again was their petition in 1811, Lancashire weavers resorted to the "contentious performance" of machine-breaking, which was being adopted in those years also by Nottingham framework-knitters and Yorkshire croppers (ibidem: 570, 643). Machine-breaking was practised in Lancashire in the context of other forms of struggle, which included food riots, mobilisation for political reform and also, according to Thompson, arming for insurrectionary purpose (ibidem: 620, 624; see also Dinwiddy 1979).²² While before 1812 Church-and-King mobs were prevalent in Manchester, "by 1819 whole communities of Lancashire weavers had adhered to the cause of reform" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 620, 710). Many leaders of the Chartist organisations and protests received their political training in those struggles of Lancashire outworkers (ibidem: 325). In their times of prosperity, weavers had created communities characterised by a lively culture. It was these communities of 'rural patriots' which mobilised in a peaceful and disciplined way - in the number of sixty or a hundred thousand - in the demonstrations temporarily put at rest by the

²² The tradition of machine-wrecking had a longer tradition than the Luddite disturbances of these years. Not always did it imply "a special hostility to machines as such", but was "under certain conditions, a normal means of putting pressure on employers or putters-out" (see Hobshawm 1968: 6-7).

bloody repression at St. Peter's Fields in August 1819 (ibidem: 339, 322, 708, 748).

The Minimum Wage Bill was presented again four times between 1835 and 1837, always with no effect (E.P. Thompson 1980: 331-2), but other activities of pressurising the political system developed. Michael Sadler, Tory MP for Leeds in 1832, "was the leading parliamentary champion of the 10 Hour Bill" (ibidem: 371). "With Oastler's help, Short-Time Committees of the workers organized the collection of evidence - notably from the West Riding - for presentation" to Sadler's committee instituted in the same year.²³ A third campaign, which was "violent, protracted and intense" in the weaving districts of Yorkshire and Lancashire, developed against the New Poor Law of 1834. This had substituted for the traditional parish relief, a system whereby relief was given only to the poor who agreed to accept the strict regime of the workhouse (ibidem: 335). Their mobilisation oscillating between institutional pressure and - as the political system turned out to be closed - violent activity, weavers were eventually transformed "into confirmed 'physical force' Chartists" (ibidem: 333).

The title of one of Richard Oastler's periodicals was *The Home, The Altar, the Throne, and the Cottage* (E.P. Thompson 1980: 380). Oastler contributed to an anti-factory tradition that was trying to preserve English, both aristocratic and popular, traditions against the innovation of the market economy and the new social and technical conditions of production. John Fielden, an "intriguing" figure, "who

²³ On the "trade union implication" for the spinners of the proposal for reducing the working day of

combined the roles of fair employer, member of a major manufacturing dynasty and urban squirearchy, and radical parliamentary friend of the people", published in 1836 the pamphlet *The Curse of the Factory System* (Gray 1986: 373; E.P. Thompson 1980: 371). Fielden was friend of William Cobbett, the political journalist that Thompson judges to be pivotal in the development of the popular movement's discourse which was to culminate in Chartism. Cobbett, whose weekly *Political Register* ran 40-60,000 copies at the end of 1816 (E.P. Thompson 1980: 789), was extremely influential on the growth of political awareness among the popular strata. Despite his shortcoming as political organiser, "he rode the countryside to find out how men were thinking and talking" (ibidem: 833) and this reference to the actual experience of his readers held in check his propensity to "personal vanity" (ibidem: 828-9). Cobbett's opposition to the emerging commercial and industrial society was alimented by the worldview of the country gentleman, faithful to his customary social obligations, "whose passing he so often lamented" (ibidem: 835). But what he was also nostalgic for, was the old independence of small farmers, small tradesmen and weavers (ibidem: 834). Thus "weavers provided, in 1816, a natural audience to Cobbett" (ibidem: 326). "Only few handloom weavers entered the factories" (Rule 1986: 174), and "whereas mule-spinning was generally reserved for male operatives, the power-loom more often was attended by women or juveniles" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 337). The weaver "resented, first, the discipline of the factory", but "to 'stand at their command' ... was the most deeply resented indignity. For he felt himself - at heart - to be the real maker of the cloth" and "to enter the mill was to fall in status

children, see Rule 1986: 304.

from a self-motivated man, however poor, to a servant or 'hand' " (ibidem: 337-8). Cobbett spoke for all those groups of people who, like "most sections of woollen workers and small masters of both Yorkshire and the west . . . all converged in a general detestation of the factory system. ... The threat of the gig-mill was one element only in a general revulsion against the great employers who were breaking down working customs and disrupting a settled way of life" (ibidem: 577).

As highlighted by Thompson, Cobbett performs a relevant innovation within this originally Tory tendency, which was opposing "the abuses of industrialism" and the Anti-Corn Law League, thereby revealing "deep sources of resentment among traditionalists before the innovations and the growing power of the moneyed middle class" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 377). The innovation consists in grafting onto this tradition, thus transforming it, a democratic notion of political independence. "Cobbett ... insisted upon the duty of the electors, whether freeholders, tradesmen and artisans, to free themselves by their own exertions from patronage, bribery and deference" (ibidem: 509). The theme of respectability could be played in terms of individualistic self-improvement and acceptance of the disciplinary rigour of the factory or the workhouse. Within the London popular movement, Francis Place, who was very close to the artisans' activities of self-organisation, was in his turn utilising the motif of respectability as an attempt "to build bridges towards the middle class [rather] than to try and bridge the gulf between [the self-respected artisans] and the tumultuous poor" (ibidem: 153).

Thus, Hunt and Cobbett extolled "the virtues of water over beer and spirits", as the latter were taxed articles (E.P. Thompson 1980: 814). Cobbett's appeal to sobriety was thus in the mould of the Radical tradition's efforts of rescuing "the people from the imputation of being a 'mob' " (ibidem; 813). With Cobbett there develops a new tradition which, while maintaining loyalty to the Monarchy and the Established Church, advocates a strenuous popular struggle against 'the Thing', another way of defining the alliance between the political system, monopolised by the gentry and the aristocracy, and the interests of mill-owners and capitalist intermediaries (ibidem: 831-2, 710). With the hindsight of the agitations of the 1830s and the 1840s, Cobbett builds a bridge between the large pauperised masses of the North, such as the outworking weavers who had been resisting rationalisation through Luddism or asking in vain for protection from the political system, and the urban, Radical tradition of the artisan workers. In order to contribute to the development of an autonomous popular movement, Cobbett had to free the tradition of nostalgic critique of the factory system from its possible paternalistic implications. By the same token, with his invectives against the 'Scotch feelosofers', he erected a further "insurmountable barrier" to the encroachment of utilitarian political economy upon the popular movement, a potentiality which was in fact actualised by Place and Wade (ibidem: 837; 849-50).

6 - Integration and peak

With the agitation for Reform in 1830-2 and then with Chartism (1838-1848), the popular movement acquires a national dimension. Charles Tilly explains this process in terms of a change in the structure of political opportunities for popular contention (Tilly 1995: in partic. 337; see also above 1-3 and 1-4). The involvement of the British state in warfare activities during the second half of the 18th and the early decades of the 19th century brings about an increased importance of the parliament relatively to the other constitutional powers, given the state's growing need for resources (ibidem: 195). As a consequence, "the great politicization of economic relations" took place and "mass national politics had arrived on a national scale" (ibidem: 336 and 339). Whereas in the eighteenth century plebeian contention is confined within a local dimension, the first half of the nineteenth century witnesses "working-class attempts to acquire a share of national power" (ibidem: 331). In the nineteenth-century "repertoire", popular participation in "contentious gatherings" takes place as "members or representatives of special interests ... and named associations" rather than, as in the previous century, as "members or representatives of constituted corporate groups and communities" (ibidem: 365).

On the basis of the reconstruction that I have attempted in sections 3-5, I assume the development of a nation-wide popular movement to be, on the contrary, the outcome of a process of integrating different component parts which had grown, during the

earlier decades, each on diverse grounds, with short-lived intertwining. For sake of brevity, I focused my attention on those which appeared to be, on the basis of the historiographical literature, the most relevant components of the popular movement whose apex coincided with the Chartist "wave of protest": the artisans in centres such as London; the textile outworkers and factory workers mainly in Lancashire communities; the political Radical tradition; the crowd, particularly in London, which included the unorganised poor and, among them, both the labourers trapped in the sweated sectors of manufacturing and those on the borderline of illegal activities.

The interpretation of Chartism needs to take such complexity into account (see also Gray 1986: 373). Seen as a concrete popular movement in space-time, Chartism cannot be defined without the identification of its main components and the relations among them. This might constitute a promising methodological presupposition in order to address the controversy which has developed among historians around the interpretation of Chartism. One way of approaching the debate concerns the degree of novel features that the popular movement displayed in its Chartist phase, as compared with the previous waves of protest: the Jacobin agitations of the 1790s and the "popular disturbances" which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars. My argument has been constructed sharing Stedman Jones' conviction that there is a substantial continuity in the popular movement from the 1790s to the 1840s and that this red thread is represented by the political programme of universal suffrage (Stedman Jones 1983: 110).²⁴

²⁴ "Chartism was a political movement. ... A political movement ... its existence is distinguished by a

By the same token, there are certainly unprecedented elements in the Chartist movement, which are to be seen as the culmination of processes going on in the decades earlier than 1830, but were also favoured by the contingent occurrence of the 1832 Reform Bill. In fact, on the one hand, since the extension of the franchise - limited to those residents holding property worth at least 10 pounds per year (Tilly 1995: 14) -, detaches part of the middle strata from the popular movement, the latter becomes increasingly, almost exclusively, composed of workers (Stedman Jones 1983: 173 and 165). On the other hand, however, working people and, among them, first of all the artisans bring into the movement the outlook and the legacy of experience that they have been maturing in the struggles of the earlier decades (cf. Epstein 1986: 203). The relation between the logic of social movement within artisans' action - with the antagonistic struggle to which it gives rise against opponents located within civil society (see chapt. 2) -, and the popular movement as a whole, with its prevalently political discourse, is the angle from which I am going to look at Chartism in the next two sections. The hope is that social movement theory might shed some light over the controversial issue of the supposedly class nature of the popular movement in this historical phase.

There is plenty of evidence on the overwhelming presence and relevance of artisans within the Chartist movement. In section 3 I tried to show how artisans in centres such as London and Birmingham were engaged in a conflict with innovating masters

shared conviction articulating a political solution to distress and a political diagnosis to its causes"

which revolved around the control over the labour markets of the various trades. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, on the one hand, artisans developed inter-trade activities either for financially supporting some trade, engaged in a bitter strike, or to put pressure onto the institutional system against adverse legislation or judiciary repression (see Prothero 1971: pp. 207-8); on the other, they intertwined their discourse with political Radicalism (see 3-4 above). However, when the country delegates assembled in London in February 1839 for the 'General Convention of the Industrious Classes', they found the capital city in a deplorable condition of apathy²⁵, despite the fact that it was in the capital city that Lovett, the author of the People's Charter with its six points of political reform, was active with his Working Men's Association (Prothero 1969: 77 and 80; Mather 1980: 47-8). The subsequent growth of Chartism in London was due to the activity of the lower trades such as tailors, shoemakers and cabinet-makers, in whose markets "the great warehouses selling slop clothing, shoes and furniture led to reductions by masters and the growth of sweating"; carpenters "the largest trade in the metropolis", silk-weavers, hatters, plasterers, stonemasons and smiths (Prothero 1971: 207; 203 and 210). "At the peak of London Chartism in the years 1841-3 about a third of all localities of the National Charter Association were confined to members of a single trade."²⁶ Several of them actually met at a house of call ..." (ibidem: 202-3;) and "the London trades took part in the great procession which accompanied the National

(Stedman Jones 1983: 96; see also Joyce 1992: 64).

²⁵ On the reasons for that, see Prothero 1969: 85 and 88.

²⁶ "Especially as members of certain occupations tended to reside in certain areas" (Prothero 1971: 206).

Petition to Parliament in April 1842" (Prothero 1969: 100).²⁷

Continuous and discontinuous elements were then simultaneously present in London Chartism, when compared with the Radical movement of the previous decades. Classical republicans represent such continuity in terms of personnel, but after 1840 they "mostly confined their politics to the local level", for example defending non unionised "paupers against harsh treatment by the Marylebone vestry" (Prothero 1969: 94). Non-working men withdrew from single-trade localities and "the leading place in Chartism was taken by more obviously working men" (ibidem: 95 and 94). This brought the movement to put different emphases in its discourse and to introduce new items. "In 1839 most speakers denounced 'corrupt and exclusive legislation'. In the 1840s it was 'class legislation' which was castigated by Chartists, including O'Connor" (ibidem: 95). The stance towards the Corn Law is indicative in this respect. Despite a general distrust of free trade, that was seen maturing during the 1820s (cf. 3-4 above), "the Corn Laws were hated as a tax on poor man's bread" (ibidem: 85). Thus "in the early period of London Chartism the abolition of the Corn Laws was regarded as desirable" (ibidem: 95). However, the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League was seen "as a diversion from the great work in hand, and its object was unlikely to be attained without a reform of the franchise as well" (ibidem: 96). A

²⁷ The more privileged trades, on the contrary, such as "compositors, engineers, shipwrights, coopers, bookbinders, watch-makers, goldsmiths, wheelwrights and coachmakers" (ibidem: 210) kept themselves aloof from the popular movement from the fear of having to continuously support the poorer and more numerous lower trades. At most, they adopted an instrumental stance towards inter-trade and Chartist attempts at permanent co-ordination (see for details Rule 1986: 319; Prothero 1971: 208, note 2; 210 and 216).

further slippage in the popular movement's discourse can be seen by the early 1840s, when "the main argument was much more that the League was a selfish middle-class body trying to cheapen the price of bread so as to be able to pay low wages. This argument had been utilized before but was now much more prominent" (ibidem). As a consequence, "nearly every public Anti-Corn Law meeting was interrupted" by Chartists (ibidem).

It is possible to explain this elaboration of an autonomous viewpoint by popular strata with the development of a labour identity emerging out of the artisans' struggles against their opponents located in civil society (cf. 3-3 above). Autonomy which can be observed in the organisational characteristics of Chartist localities as well, with "their direct democracy and dislike of control by gentlemen" and manifesting "a desire for self-government and independence" (Prothero 1969: 86). This labour identity matured in the forms of inter-trade co-ordination which pre-existed the Chartist phase, but were themselves fostered by the impulse of Chartist propaganda (see Prothero 1971: 213). Thus the National Association of United Trades, which was set up in 1845, could speak in terms of labour as the source of all value. Moreover, the 1848 programme of the metropolitan trades included the demand for "a Labour Protecting Board, elected by the working classes, whose members would sit *ex officio* in Parliament and whose president would be a member of the cabinet" (Prothero 1971: 219). However, these changes did not find the opportunities for further development, as after 1848 the popular movement irreversibly declined (see Belchem 1982) and, as it will be seen in next chapter, the unity of its components disintegrates,

whilst popular action loses its ideational and organisational autonomy.

It is indeed from its capacity to integrate different components that the popular movement derived its strength during its Chartist phase, so that the definition is warranted of "London Chartism as the climax of a period of artisan radicalism" (Prothero 1969: 101). Chartism developed a wide array of activities which were opened not only to artisans and political militants. "Some localities opened their own shops and co-operative stores, built up libraries and had classes on history and elocution" (ibidem: 98). Especially when political agitation was at its low point "there were plans for Chartist tract societies, Chartist coffee-houses, Chartist church attendance, Chartist co-operative production and Chartism tee-totalism" (ibidem). As Prothero remarks, "London Chartism consisted not only of the occasional great meetings but also of the many small weekly meetings which were enjoyed in the company of friends and in which wives could often participate. Chartism had its social side, in excursions to Watford and up to the Thames, and in innumerable balls, *soirées* and raffles" (ibidem: 101; see also E. Yeo 1971 and Eley 1981). But also in those events which can be included in Tilly's "contentious gatherings" one can see the capacity of integrating different components which was typical of Chartism and explains the wide range of support it was able to raise. Together with the artisans, the London crowd was part of Chartist agitations, thus representing an element of continuity with the "disturbances" of the previous century. Here what is remarkable is not the lack of political awareness of the poor (see for instance Prothero 1969: 82), but rather the fact that these unorganised strata were involved within the orbit of the

popular movement under the banner of universal suffrage. Police reports denounced Chartist meetings "as attended by thieves, costermongers and lads" and "there were riots during the Reform Crisis of 1830-32 and ... in 1839, 1842 and 1848, all years of distress" (ibidem: 82 and 90). The crowd "believed the rich lived out of taxes, especially those on tobacco. The sum total of their principles was a hatred of authorities, the police and beaks. The Queen, Lords and Commons, if known about, were regarded as natural enemies. Their hatred of authority tended to concentrate on the Metropolitan police, with whom there were fights in 1830, 1842 and 1848. (ibidem: 90).²⁸

In general, the strength of Chartism in London can be explained by its capacity to hold together, though in tension, the poles of respectability and rationalism with the pole of roughness within popular culture. Thus, on the one hand, Chartism was associated with the temperance and total abstinence movements. On the other hand, the shoemakers, who were over-represented in the leadership of the London localities of the National Charter Association, had a "reputation for drunkenness and rowdiness" and "of being particularly irregular in their working hours" (see Jones 1975: 45-49; Prothero 1969: 83 and 103-5; D. Thompson 1984: 180). As Dorothy Thompson comments: "The rough and the respectable had to an extent worked together in the Chartist movement. In later years they became separated, even hostile"

²⁸ In the London of the years leading to Chartism, the rough pole of the popular movement prospered in the " 'male republic' of the alehouse club", where "ultra-radical debating clubs were interested ... in producing ... a type of plebeian-populist rhetoric ... designed to impel action and debunk authority. ... Anyone who attended the Mulberry Tree well dressed was accused of being a spy" (McCalman 1987: 316; 321-2 and 324).

(D. Thompson 1984: 338).

In the North, Chartist agitation and organisation followed a similar, though non synchronised (see Stedman Jones 1983: 98), development as in London. Analogous processes went on, such as the development of inter-trade activities and the politicisation of artisans and workers, organised within trade unions, and local communities. Inter-trade co-operation had begun to consolidate around the mid-1830s in a series of campaigns such as the Factory and the Anti-Poor Law movements (cf. 3-5). It received a further impulse and increasingly overlapped in organisational terms with Radical agitation during campaigns against the repression of unionists in various areas of the country (see Sykes 1982: 155-6). As in London, "an alignment of radicals and trade unions was encouraged by the consistent support for strikes by radical leaders and newspapers, and the consistent malevolence of middle-class politicians and press". Moreover, troops were used in strikes and the political system during the 1830s, as it was seen in 3-5, remained closed up to any sort of demands coming from the working classes (ibidem: 155; Prothero 1971: 210; see also above 3-4; Stedman Jones 1983: 175; E.P. Thompson 1980: 903-4). As a consequence, in Manchester, the trades boycotted the Coronation Procession of the summer 1838, in which they had participated *en masse* in 1831, and instead joined in "the first Chartist great demonstration" (Sykes 1982: 159-61). In the "Coronation address signed by twenty-three trades" they argued that "the 'tyranny of capitalists' was 'consequent upon' a corrupt political system. ... Hence the workers' ultimate solution to their predicament lay in political power" (Sykes 1982: 172). In addition, since the organisational pattern

of protest was characterised, unlike in London, by spontaneous mass outbursts and weak institutional consolidation, "the Chartists could bring leadership and organisational skill" and, for instance, in Manchester they "led and organized the powerloom weavers" (ibidem: 165-8).

The peak of Chartist and workers' mobilisation in South Lancashire was the Plug Strikes in the summer of 1842. The protest originated in the North Staffordshire coalfields, but after one month it had spread into the Manchester cotton district.²⁹ Among workers' demands, economic issues prevailed at certain moments of the struggle; in Manchester, however, the leadership was taken up by a conference of delegates from the region, who by majority adopted the Charter as the aim of the mobilisation (Rule 1986: 332-3). The composition of this conference gives us a picture of the components of the popular movement in this conjuncture (Sykes 1982: 176-184). As in London but with some exceptions, the "aristocratical portion of the Trades" kept themselves distant from the movement. The bulk of the mobilisation was composed of lower artisans, mainly "from the building and clothing sector", and cotton factory workers, with the spinners at centre stage. Textile outworkers were represented, but the number of cotton handloom weavers had been much depleted by then. Lower artisans such as tailors, shoemakers, the building trades and the carpenters were facing similar attacks as their counterparts in London (see ibidem: 183). In addition, spinners were under a strong pressure from the technological

²⁹ It was in fact "the first general strike" as, though not nation-wide, it extended to twenty-three counties between central and northern England, Wales, and Scotland, bringing together town-wide workers' communities beyond occupational belonging. (Rule 1986: 332-3; see also Tilly 1995: 7).

change that was being introduced in the 1830s. "Firstly the new long mules and the coupling together, or double-decking, of pairs of mules ... resulted in substantial unemployment and increased workload.... Secondly there were the self-acting mules which spread rapidly in coarse spinning" after 1830. "By making the final stages of the mules' operational cycle automatic, or self-acting, the self-actors removed most of the need for skill and strength. They thus substantially undermined the technical basis for the spinners' skilled status. The wages of fine and coarse spinners fell dramatically" (ibidem: 182).

In a similar way as in London, Chartism gained its maximum strength in south-east Lancashire when popular action was able to integrate its component parts, which in the previous decades of trade union struggle and Radical mobilisation had been acting separately (see above 3-5). Also in the North such a process of integration was the culmination of dynamics which had originated in the previous years: the development of inter-trade activities and the intertwining between political Radicalism and social struggles (see ibidem). As in London, a labour identity grew within the popular movement, after having matured during the struggles that artisans and factory workers were carrying out in order to resist the processes of change directed by employers. On the basis of this labour identity, workers elaborated an "alternative political economy" that Chartism in many public occasions put at the centre of its discourse. "It involved a critique of excessive competition, over-production, unregulated improvements in machinery, excessive employers' power and the effects of a growing labour surplus. Its postulated solutions emphasised the role of a ten hour

bill to restrict competition and over-production, the colonisation of the land to ease the labour surplus (and set a basic living standard below which competition would be unable to depress workers), increased wages to stimulate home consumption and, of course, the achievement of working-class political power" (Sykes. 1982: 170).

7 - Social conflict and popular movement

Already taking into account the Radical movement before the Chartist phase of the 1830s and 1840s, it is possible to highlight the differences between the popular action which sustained it and the plebeian rebelliousness of the previous century. Following E.P. Thompson's interpretation, it was argued that eighteenth-century protests were framed within a discourse which did not challenge the legitimacy of the social and political power of gentry and aristocracy (cf. above 3-2). As Tilly remarks, plebeians "appealed to powerful patrons for redress of wrongs" (1995: 363). They did not envisage a project of emancipation from domination which could thus transcend the present order of things.

There is a connection between the development of such a discourse and the question of the ideational and organisational autonomy of the popular movement, that Tilly reduces to the emergence of politics of interests, given his conception of society where groups are distinguished according to their unequal position of in/exclusion in

relation to the political system, and any reference to social relations of domination is lacking (see above 1-4). In sections 3-3 and 3-4 above, in the wake of E.P. Thompson's scholarship, I referred to the importance of Thomas Paine, John Gast and William Cobbett for the definition of such an autonomy. As it was seen in 3-4, the historicist strand of argument, revived in the eighteenth-century, never subsided within the Radical movement *vis-à-vis* the Paineite anti-traditionalist discourse. Nevertheless, Paine's political argument conferred on the popular movement the perspective of an alternative order where the power resides in the hands of the people and both the Crown and the aristocracy are abolished. Gast contributed to elaborating an artisan notion of independence and respectability in terms that were different from the conception and the practical implications adopted by middle-class advocates of free-market ideology. Cobbett performed the same task with reference to the experience of the northern outworkers whose way of life was being devastated by the advent of the factory system. In addition, he gave a decisive contribution to the autonomy of the popular movement's discourse by erecting a barrier against the possible utilisation of anti-factory arguments in the direction of reproducing Tory paternalism.

In the Chartist phase the popular movement integrates within a nation-wide organisation its local components. In this section I have limited my consideration to two of the most important among them, the ones of London and Lancashire. These local components are, in their turn, able to integrate in the Chartist period empirical components which, in the previous decades, had developed separately and had

achieved forms of partial and temporary integration:³⁰ both in London and in Lancashire artisans and Radicals, who are joined by unorganised workers and precarious strata in the metropolis, and in Lancashire by factory workers and particularly the spinners. Such an integration occurred around the programme of political change centred on universal male franchise (see also Gray 1986: 368). Therefore, the interpretation of Chartism needs to carefully balance continuities and "shifts in register" (ibidem: 370) within the discourse of the popular movement. The "analysis of society" was always in terms of "the nation against the government" (Prothero 1974: 135), but " 'people' in 1832 did not mean the same as in 1792, and was being re-defined to mean working or labouring people" (ibidem: 143; see also pp. 167-171 for Radicals reconsidering, after their involvement in trade union struggles, the plan for the Jacobin 'Grand National Holiday', as "no longer a purely political" weapon.)

During the first half of the nineteenth century the autonomy of the English popular movement *vis-à-vis* the middle classes is to be associated mainly with the experience of the artisans. They engage in a conflict with innovating employers, that was shown to revolve around the control over the labour market. Here a logic of social movement can be found in the action of the artisans: a logic of antagonistic conflict against opponents who are located at the level of civil society. This logic re-emerges after a specific dispute has been settled in some way or artisans have been defeated, either because the employers are on the offensive again or because new resources for

³⁰ For the several but shortlived attempts at general unionism in the late 1820s and early 1830s, see

mobilisation are available. It is important to analyse the model of conflict which is structured by this logic of social movement, in order to show the relationship that is established between the latter, as analytical component, and the popular movement considered as a whole.

The autonomy of the popular movement can be explained also in relation to its capacity, in its Chartist phase, to hold together the different poles of popular culture, together with the various strata which are prevalently bearers of them: the pole of respectability and rationality which is due to artisans and Jacobins; the pole of emotionality prevalently borne by the communities of textile workers in the North;³¹ and the pole of roughness which is typical of London unorganised and precarious strata. It is possible to appreciate the nexus between the integration of these three components of popular culture and the autonomy of the popular movement by comparison with the immediately subsequent historical phase, when the popular movement decomposes and its - analytical and empirical - components split (see E.P. Thompson 1980: 340 and 937). In such disintegration, which will be explored in Chapter Four, the rationalist pole is reabsorbed by the discourse of the middle classes and the conflict of the artisans - who have become skilled workers in the factories - loses its antagonistic character. Thus, in the three decades after 1850, work conflict is not conceived by workers as falling within the context of a more general struggle

Rule 1986: 306-7.

³¹ As Thompson puts it: "South and North, intellect and enthusiasm, the argument of secularism and the rhetoric of love - the tension is perpetuated in the nineteenth century. And each tradition seems enfeebled without the complement of the other" (1980: 58).

which is aimed at an alternative society, whereas at the political level unionised workers are attracted into the orbit of the Liberal Party, which transforms itself during these decades in order to successfully represent the interests of these strata (McClelland 1987: 190; Biagini and Reid 1991: 10-11). Always during the decades after 1850, the emotional pole of the Northern communities becomes subordinate to employers' paternalism, while the rebelliousness of the London crowd falls within the sphere of influence of Tory nationalism (Joyce 1992: 122; Stedman Jones 1983: 230-1). When afterwards, starting from the latest decades of the nineteenth century, another, different model of conflict is reconstituted - as it will be seen in Chapter Five -, a new process of integration is set in motion between the various components of the popular movement; a movement which is once again defined by its autonomy in both organisational terms - for instance in the forms of political representation - and on the plane of discourse.

It is then once again by comparison that the artisans' conflict can be grasped, but now the term of reference is the model of conflict which is being structured from around the 1880s. On this basis an explanation can be attempted concerning the reasons why the popular movement, seen as a whole, is integrated around the discourse of political Radicalism. The claim for universal franchise cannot be reduced to the search for an institutional representation of interests, to a pressure for being included within the polity. As Thompson put it, "the vote implied also further claims: a new way of reaching out by the working people for *social control* over their conditions of life and labour" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 910; emphasis in the original). Despite their activities

being formally similar, Chartism was thus different from O'Connell's Catholic Association that for Tilly is prototypical of social movement politics (Tilly 1982: 45-6; Tilly 1995: 278-9), having defined the latter as a type of campaign "outside the bounds of routine politics" (Tilly 1995: 214; see above 1-3 and 1-4). The Radical artisans in fact believed that it was possible to build an alternative social order on the basis of having achieved the right to vote for every adult male (see also Briggs 1967: 66-9). The interpretative problem thus becomes to understand why the social conflict of artisans and factory workers did not assume a prominent position in the discourse of the popular movement considered as a whole.

Stedman Jones' explanation detects a special autonomy of political discourse in structuring the language of the popular movement. Seen in this light, the particular instance of Chartism matches the "linguistic turn" in social theory and, consequently, the objectivistic bias of both Marxist and sociological interpretations, which relate the political orientation of the popular movement to the social condition of its participants, can be chastised (Stedman Jones 1983: 21-2; 93-96). However, it is possible to explain the prevalence of the political language of Radicalism in the discourse of the popular movement taken as a whole, by taking the action of the artisans into account and the model of conflict it did structure.

An analysis of it in terms of the a) identity, b) the definition of the opponent and c) the principle of general re-organisation of society (totality) which is envisaged by the artisans in their struggle, shows both the internal consistency of this model of conflict

and its difference from what can properly be defined as the model of class conflict of the early twentieth century. When the artisans were putting an "emphasis on productive labour as the only true source of wealth", they were elaborating a definition of labour identity which was wider than the identity of the single trade (Rule 1986: 289) and "hardly thinkable in the eighteenth-century context" (Rule 1987: 118). However, the integration with the unskilled labourers and the unorganised crowd could not be achieved on the terrain of the labour identity and the logic of social movement, but could happen on the political ground of the universal franchise.

a) The very definition of an artisan identity, with the centrality of the issue of apprenticeship (see above 3-3), implied in fact that the outlook of the skilled artisans, in the struggles they were carrying on at the level of civil society, "was to avoid being 'sweated' into a proletariat along with the expanding population of the unskilled" (Rule 1986: 299). Engaged in counteracting the deterioration of their condition, the artisans were striving "to hold back the unskilled tide" (E.P. Thompson 1980: 285-6; see also p. 269). Also in those cases where the discourse of the popular movement, influenced by the artisans' outlook, most clearly envisaged a project of re-organisation of the country which linked both the social and the political spheres, the diffidence towards the unskilled comes forth unequivocally. James Morrison, for instance, who "gave to ideas of co-operative production and exchange advanced by Owen, a harder edge of class hostility", advocated the claim "that ultimately the affairs of the country would be governed by the producers of wealth associated in

their crafts, and delegating to a 'parliament of trades' " (Rule 1986: 304-5). Yet, he was also convinced that "the ignorant mass of the unskilled would be better controlled within a hierarchical union structure than they would be if simply given the vote" (ibidem).

b) At the same time, the opponent in the struggles at the level of civil society, that were seen in 3-3 to be centred around the control of the labour market - because of its cruciality both for the levels of compensation and for the control of work organisation -, is defined in moral rather than social terms (Stedman Jones 1983: 117). As Stedman Jones makes clear, the picture of the innovating employer which is drawn by the artisans is not one in which "the role of the employer as manager and controller of the process is a crucial feature of its exploitative character" (ibidem: 137; see also E.P. Thompson 1980: 856). The middleman or the master who were altering the traditional practices of work employment and organisation, were denounced as "dishonourable" and criticised because either foreign to the trade or traitors of its norms (see for example Rule 1986: 294-5, who makes reference to the builders facing "the increased practice of 'general contracting' "). In all trades social opponents were defined as outsiders "or 'Adventurers', not brought up to the trade and ignorant of its customs" (Prothero 1971: 207).

In general terms, the artisans do not conceive of such a conflict in terms of class. It was seen that their opponent was "the merchant organiser of domestic production. That he performed no manufacturing function helped to identify this form of capitalist

as 'parasitic' and 'non productive' " (Rule 1987: 117). Thus "the fundamental conflict was not between employed and employers, but between the working classes and the idle classes". It was, in the 1834 words of a movement leader, "a war of honest industry against idle profligacy" (Stedman Jones 1983: 143), with the latter definition including, together with middlemen denounced as interlopers (E.P. Thompson 1980: 857), the landed aristocracy and the political elite.

c) Finally, if we look at co-operation, the utopia that the discourse of the artisans envisages as a project of alternative re-organisation of society, a further difference with the model of class conflict turns out to be apparent. For instance in June 1833, in the midst of a bitter confrontation against general contracting, "the Builders' Union held a six-day delegate meeting [in Manchester]: the Builders' Parliament with 270 delegates representing 30,000 operatives. ... This was the famous meeting addressed by Robert Owen". Their project was to re-organise the industry according to the principle of co-operative production. In the words of a leader, the meeting was marking 'the beginning of a new era in the condition of the whole of the working classes of the world' (quoted in Rule 1986: 295). In other branches, where artisans' control over the production process was firmer, the plans for an alternative re-organisation concerned distribution. This was consistent with the Radical analysis, which "did not itself look towards production as central, but concentrated chiefly on the areas of economic exchange and distribution" (Joyce 1992: 64). An instance of this phenomenon is provided by the attempt in Birmingham to set up a Labour Exchange scheme, which was triggered by Owen's lecturing activity at the end of

1832. The scheme, whose "initiators were predominantly small masters and artisans ... was designed to provide a location where the goods produced by 'the legitimate pursuit of trade' could be marketed without the critical mediation of the large-scale producer or the merchant" (Behagg 1992: 78-82). The utopia of co-operation, matured in the context of the conflict between artisans and innovating masters, expressed artisans' aspiration for a 're-generation' of society (Stedman Jones 1983: 131), when the power balance over the control of the markets of both labour and goods would be altered in their favour. The penny, unstamped, weekly newspaper, the *Birmingham Labour Exchange Gazette*, witnesses the artisans' aspiration that "the Exchange would be concerned not simply to provide an extension to the available market but to create an alternative marketing mode" (Behagg 1992: 82).

Artisans were then in the popular struggle for political change with an outlook which envisaged the construction of a new social order, that they conceived of in the course of their - in the last instance - non-negotiable struggle. "It was artisan groups like tailors, shoemakers and building craftsmen who could envisage the carrying on of their trade in a manner which made large non-productive capitalists unnecessary" (Rule 1986: 292). This was the specific contribution that they brought to the popular movement as a whole. "A future of co-operative production was essentially one in which the artisan would recover his status, his pride, his well-being and his independence: the just reward of the special property of skilled labour which he possessed" (ibidem: 296). This logic of antagonistic struggle, developed on the terrain of civil society, makes the interpretation of the popular movement, whose climax was

Chartism, not reducible in its orientation to political inclusion. "Universal suffrage ... in the most extreme version ... might transform distributors into salaried assistants of co-operatives of producers" (Stedman Jones 1983: 140-1).

By the same token, the analysis of this logic, in terms of the reconstruction of the model of conflict it engenders, shows its distance from the collective action which will be developed by British workers from the late nineteenth century. One of the early organisers of the Exchange in Birmingham "pointed to the unitary nature of the 'small masters' and the 'outworking operatives'. The Labour Exchange aimed to reconstitute this organic relationship by eliminating the intrusive elements of capitalist marketing which threatened to destroy it" (Behagg 1992: 81). It is in the last instance by highlighting the movement's outlook towards the rationalisation of production techniques, that the difference between the two models of conflict, conceived of synchronically, can be appreciated. Artisans were making reference to a past 'golden age', as epitomised by the 1811 'Ode to the Memory of Queen Elizabeth' (Rule 1986: 114; E.P. Thompson 1968: 23). However, to conclude the analysis with this point would overstress the continuity with the model of protest of the previous century, with its absence of a project which could envisage the transcending of social order and the overcoming of domination (see above 3-2). As Thompson puts it, by 1816 it had become "possible for individual working men to have a sense - not just of sporadic crowd turbulence - but of sustained commitment to a movement" (1980: 938). Insofar as it was influenced by the logic of the artisans' action, more distinctly since the early 1830s, the popular movement was defining a

project of a new society (see E.P. Thompson 1980: 887), where the power of labour was being asserted against employers' domination mainly over the labour market. It is the presence of this logic that marks the autonomy, both organisational and ideational, of the popular movement when it is compared with the rural and urban crowd of the previous century. However, for the artisans the utopia of co-operation in production and distribution was meant to allow them to continue with their own customary work practices. On the contrary, the workers' power, which is advocated by the labour movement in the early decades of the 20th century, takes up the employers' challenge of modernisation. It promises a more rational society, which would make a fuller use than capitalism of the possibilities offered to production by scientific and technical development.

Hence "the resolutions of the Bolton spinners during the Plug Strikes" advocated "restrictions on all moving power" (Sykes 1982: 170). The spinners' position, faced with the direct domination over their work in the factory, was partly specific among the other trades. According to Rule, in the years 1829-30 "the core appeal of Owenism, that through co-operative production working men could re-possess their trades, touched no chord of relevance among the cotton spinners, however much in other respects their status perception labelled them 'factory artisans' " (1986: 292). Yet, as Stedman Jones remarks, "no proposals was ever made to take over the mills and expropriate their owners" (Stedman Jones 1983: 157). That the factory was not chosen as the terrain from which the struggle for power at a general level could be

waged,³² is seen by the importance that still in the 1840s the issue of landed property held within the discourse of the popular movement. Especially when the prospects for the struggle seemed bleak, because of the absence of results at the political level and the further weakening of artisans and workers in the labour market, O' Connor launched his Land Plan, aimed at "the removal of surplus labour by use of the land" (Prothero 1971: 215-6). "As the usurpation of their natural rights to cultivate the soil had made them 'landless' wage slaves in the first place, ... the resumption of rights to the land would be the most effective answer to the tyranny of the mill owner" (Stedman Jones 1983: 154).

³² As E.P. Thompson identifies class discourse with a conception of political economy alternative to the free-market, underpinned by moral economy and opposed to individualist liberalism, he does not see the workplace as the *locus* where the integration between skilled and unskilled - hence the development of a class identity (see Donnelly 1976: 221) - could be achieved around the struggle for the control of work organisation, thus defining the opponent in social and not in moral terms.

CHAPTER FOUR: DECLINE AND DISINTEGRATION

1 - The decline of labour action

The analysis of labour and popular action in Britain during the decades between about 1850 and 1880 will highlight the simultaneous actuality of processes of disintegration of the old popular movement, and of integrative dynamics which point towards the emergence of a new popular movement. In the light of the analytical categories introduced in the previous chapters, these decades are to be seen both in terms of the decomposition of the model of conflict on which labour action had been structured in the decades before 1850 (cf. above 3-7), and of processes of growing autonomy of labour action and popular culture. Indeed, in the three decades after the defeat of Chartism, processes of disintegration actually prevail, as will be seen in this chapter. Because of the decomposition of the old model of conflict, the popular movement goes through a process of disintegration among its component parts. In actuality, during mid-Victorian years, the different popular groups were themselves seeing their own collective action not as component parts of the same popular movement, unlike they had done in the previous decades, reaching its climacteric during Chartism.

This process of disintegration of the popular movement, consistently *a contrario* with the analysis carried out in the last chapter, will be related to the decline of labour action, as the latter no longer articulates, during these decades, a discourse of social antagonism and utopian reconstruction of society. In the next sections the action of the main categories of working people will be examined, together with their activity of creating institutions. The development of industrial production allows labour action, for instance on Tyneside, to be reconstructed on a partially new basis, even though it does not structure a model of antagonistic conflict. In this way, and differently from London, the decline of artisan action associated with the now "twilight world of small workshop production" is counteracted to a certain degree.

The decline of the old popular action was particularly evident in London. It was also slower in its pace. In the 1890s a shrinking pool of artisans was still sustaining Radical working men's clubs, which in the early 1870s had fuelled a fleeting revamping of Republicanism (Stedman Jones 1983: 209 and R. Harrison 1965: 210-4; 232-4). Stedman Jones's attempt to "put into relationship", with reference to London, "two themes which traditionally have been kept apart: on the one hand, the history of the labour movement, on the other, the investigation of working-class culture", locates the full swing of the process of decline in the fourth quarter of the century (1983: 235).

As Stedman Jones' shows in this early essay (1983: 179-238), the retreat of London's popular strata into a "culture of consolation" and political apathy needs to be seen in

the context of the economic decadence of artisan activities which dragged on alongside the dissolution of the trade communities, once the bulk and leaders of London Chartism (see above 3-6). "A few trades managed to maintain their traditions intact. The strongly unionized wet-coopers and silk-hatters, for instance, maintained control over apprenticeship and the work process and continued to express a strong sense of craft solidarity reinforced by traditional rituals of communal drinking and conviviality. But these trades were small and exceptional. The larger trades either declined in the face of provincial competition or else were broken up through the subdivision of the work process into separate semi-skilled trades. Silk-weaving, ship-building, watch-making and leather manufacturing were examples of the first tendency; the clothing, footwear and furniture trades examples of the second". In the 1880s contemporary observers still found clothing and shoe-making workshops to be hotbeds of Republicanism and Socialism. However, confined to "a luxury market" by the "competition from the ready-made sector", craftsmen of the West End were progressively involved in "personal dealings with the rich", a process which favoured their developing a deferential attitude, typical of the patron-client relationship. Sometimes the preservation of independent labour action unintendedly brought about the further decadence in artisan production in the capital city, as happened to shoemakers, whose "unions in 1890 successfully outlawed home work, but this only accelerated the removal of the trade to Northampton". Part and parcel of the same process of dissolution of London trade communities were the dynamics of urban change such as "the migration of the skilled working class to the suburbs", which became a "mass phenomenon from the 1870s", and the concomitant population

decline of "old skilled artisan centres", such as Holborn and Finsbury. In the suburbs the 'local' replaced the trade pub as the focal point of the workingman's leisure (ibidem: 213-20).

Such "undermining of the distinctiveness and cohesion of the old artisan culture" had consequences for the other component part of the London popular movement in Chartist times: "the vast limbo of semi-employed labourers, casualized semi-skilled artisans, 'sweated' home workers, despised foreigners, tramps and beggars" (Stedman Jones 1983: 215 and 235). The political outlook of these strata in the decades between 1870 and 1900 will be seen in section 5, again drawing on Stedman Jones' reconstruction. The depoliticisation of the 'rough pole' of popular culture is explained in the context of the decline of artisan action, since "in the period between 1790 and 1850 it was this artisan class which had provided political leadership to the unskilled and the poor" (ibidem: 215).

But in the decades after the demise of Chartism, labour action was not everywhere as weak in England as in the capital city. While "in 1897 trade unionists composed 3.5 per cent of the population of London",¹ in Lancashire and the North-East the organisational achievement of unionism was slightly better, with respective rates of 8 and 11 per cent (Stedman Jones 1983: 212). Workers displayed considerable activity in self-organisation, especially in the cases, that will shortly be analysed, of the skilled workers and miners of the North-East. However, in the decades that follow the

¹ Another feature of labour action in the capital city in the late nineteenth century was its institutional

final defeat of Chartism in 1848, a logic of social movement cannot be found as expressed by the collective action of these workers. If they resisted social domination within the workplaces and were to a certain extent successful in controlling work organisation and improving their own condition, they were not striving, unlike Chartist artisans, for an alternative social order which would do away with domination.

Other groups of workers, such as the cotton operatives, on the whole acquiesced in the social relations of subordination and assented to the paternalist offers of their employers (cf. 4-4), unlike the miners who were able, through their self-managed organisations, to resist the paternalist domination of their employers (4-3). But even the discourse articulated by the miners and by those workers who were most active in sustaining independent action and autonomous institutions - the engineers and the shipyard workers (4-2) - did not develop a critique of their social opponents which might uphold an antagonistic struggle against them. Consequently, labour action in its various disjointed components lost its characteristics of autonomy. This is also proved by the fact that workers shared the political allegiances of their opponents in civil society. They renounced the possibility of developing independent institutions at the political level, as they had done in the first half of the nineteenth century and will do in the early decades of the twentieth century (4-5). It will be seen how the ensuing process of workers and popular strata dividing their loyalty between the Liberal and the Conservative Party flows through the ducts of respectively the respectable and

fragmentation and localism. See Stedman Jones 1983: 212.

rough pole of popular culture, whose fissure represents the cultural side of the disintegration of the popular movement.

Consistent with the picture he draws, in one later already-mentioned essay, of Chartism as an eminently political movement, Stedman Jones highlights the opening up of the political system to some demands of the popular movement as the main factor for the latter's demise. Without showing any surrender to extra-parliamentary agitation, in the early 1840s Peel's government enacted measures for reducing taxes on consumption, rationalising the financial markets and forbidding the work of women in the mines (Stedman Jones 1983: 175-8). The following discussion, on the contrary, starts from the dynamics at the level of civil society, investigating the changes that popular action goes through. It centres on the logic of social movement as the analytical component which was seen in the last chapter as sustaining the autonomy of the popular movement, through both structuring an ultimately non-negotiable conflict for the control of a set of social relations, and envisaging the transcending of the social order based on domination.

The artisans were seen in the last chapter as bearers of this logic within their collective action at the level of civil society. They were engaged in a conflict against opponents whose activity of investment mainly altered labour market conditions, thus undermining, as the entrepreneurs in cotton weaving did with success, the control traditionally maintained by the trades. In the last chapter it was shown that the artisans bore this logic of antagonistic action within the popular movement as a

whole. In this later essay Stedman Jones wants to criticise those interpretations of Chartism which tend to see political discourse as the mere form taken by social action. To them he counterposes the conceptual autonomy of political discourse and its capacity of remoulding the economic grievances of artisans and factory workers into a language of political critique (Stedman Jones 1983: 94-96). However, as Gray remarks (1986), Chartism might be more convincingly explained as the integration of different empirical components, one of them, political Radicalism, prevailing within its discourse (cf. above 3-7). The way is then opened for an investigation on the course, taken by each of those components, during the decomposition of the popular movement.

The issues addressed in the next few sections are not the reasons for the decline of Chartism as a wave of protest, but for the changes within popular action in later decades. In order to account for the decomposition of an integrated popular movement and the lost autonomy of popular discourse, the next few sections investigate the transformation undergone by the logic of social movement within the collective action of three groups of workers. They have been chosen because of their relevance within the labour movement of the decades after 1850. Two of them - skilled engineers and shipyard workers on the one hand, and cotton workers on the other - are heirs of the two main labour components within the old popular movement: respectively, the artisans and the hand-loom weavers. The third one - the miners - emerges and gains importance within the union movement in these decades after 1850, together with the growth of coal production and its increased relevance

within British economy (see Gray 1981: 25). The order of presentation that the account will follow considers these groups of workers according to their decreasing strength and autonomy. The reconstruction of the collective action of the different sectors of workers will thus begin with engineers and shipyard workers, as groups of former artisans who are now inserted in the new social relations of the factory, and display the highest capacity for autonomous action in this period. The analysis of their action will be carried out by examining the new and old configuration that the principles of identity, opposition and totality take within their logic of action (cf. above 3-1).

2 - A limited autonomy

As it was seen in the last chapter, the logic of social movement expressed by artisans' action endorsed a principle of totality which was negating the practices of economic change adopted by the entrepreneurs. The artisans wanted to use and quietly enjoy their trades (cf. Thompson 1980: 279) and this was possible in their workshops, given the control of work organisation that the monopoly of knowledge concerning the labour process, reproduced through the apprenticeship system, guaranteed them (see above 3-3). Artisans, such as the shipwrights, were probably less opposed to technical development than the textile outworkers. Whereas for instance John Gast, the shipwrights' leader in the London of the early 19th century, designed proposals of

work rationalisation (cf. Linebaugh 1982: 324), cotton hand-loom weavers endorsed the anti-factory arguments which were seen above (3-5) as one of the strands within the discourse of the popular movement.

As it was seen in Chapter Three, the main attack that artisans had to face in the first half of the 1800s was the erosion of their control over labour markets by entrepreneurs. The artisans' utopia of an "egalitarian" and self-managed community "of independent artisans and smallholders" - the principle of totality in their logic of action - opposed the naturalness of custom to the artificiality of economic change and industry (see Stedman Jones 1983: 135 and Joyce 1992: 32-4, cf. also 3-3 and 3-7 above). In the second half of the century, artisans such as the tailors and the shoemakers lost their struggle for the control of the labour market (Pelling 1968: 49). "In the later nineteenth century a secure body of highly-paid artisans, protected by apprenticeship restrictions enforced by their trade unions, was only to be found in a few industries and then only in some centres of each industry": in printing; engineering and ship-building, "where expansion was rapid and skill was at a premium; and for the rest in a few small and static trades..." (ibidem: 51).

After about 1850, in the North-East of England, the heirs of workshop artisans such as the millwrights and the shipwrights, performed their tasks in a different productive context. Tyneside "economy and geography were dominated by the emergence of a relatively small number of large-scale companies... . There were about ten such engineering companies, some of which employed upwards of 1,000 men, while the

biggest ... employed 3,800 in 1863. Similarly, in shipbuilding about a dozen companies dominated, with the leading ones tending to even larger size", two of them employing 6,000-8,000 by the 1880s (McClelland 1987: 181). In these factories the work-force was dominated by "a substantial core of *skilled men*", namely "those who would generally have served a formal apprenticeship or who had worked for (usually) five years at the trade, and were recognised as 'tradesmen' by themselves and others. In engineering, the skilled trades of fitters, patternmakers, blacksmiths and others formed perhaps 40-50% of the work-force; in shipbuilding the platers, riveters, angle-iron smiths and others formed a slightly higher proportion. at around 50-55%" (McClelland 1987: *ibidem*).

One of the consequences of the factory regime was the attempt to impose a "more systematic control" on task performances through "a more rigorous regulation over time and conduct". This implied, on the one hand, the attempted imposition of "a more regular working day" and the "quite widespread practice" of enacting company's rules, which at one locomotive factory "included the imposition of fines for damaging equipment, making excessive noise, smoking, leaving work without giving notice to one of the foremen, and many others..." (*ibidem*: 183). On the other hand, threatening for the "collective knowledge" of skilled workers was "the rise of the professional engineer or the naval architect and the creation of distinctive design departments in the companies" (McClelland 1987: 191-2). In engineering the introduction of machine tools in the period 1830-50 meant a restructuring of the division of labour. Previously the work process was entirely controlled by the

millwrights, who until then "had made machinery virtually by hand". Now, "mechanization created a new class of workers with specialist skills - the fitters and the turners - who set up and supervised the machinery, while the actual minding of machines when in operation fell to the semi-skilled labourers." (Burgess 1975: 13; cf. also p. 19).

In the decades after 1850 employers' strategies of investment halted the process of technological change within the factories. Between 1850 and 1890 "the rising export content of industry as a whole was especially true of engineering". It "meant that investment in established techniques continued to be profitable" and, consequently, "the fitters and the turners consolidated their position as the largest single category of engineering labour" (Burgess 1975: 25). Thus even if "no *single* trade could exercise control within the labour process to the extent that the millwrights had been able to do in engineering or the shipwrights in shipbuilding", in both industries the new trades were nonetheless able to maintain a strong hold on work organisation. Their position was crucial within a labour process that heavily relied on handicraft abilities (McClelland 1987: 183; see also Samuel 1977). "In locomotive engineering, fitters did virtually all their work by hand, using scrapers, files and chisels to adapt 'each part of an engine to its place with the most minute exactness' " (McClelland 1987: 182). As a consequence, "on-the-job learning remained by far the most important way of transmitting skills". Furthermore it was impossible for the factory management to standardise the tasks of, for instance, the pattern-maker who, as described by contemporary observers, 'today ... may be employed on a pattern, the like of which he

has never seen before, and to-morrow on something quite different, and many of these patterns are of supreme difficulty and need deep and careful thought' (quoted in *ibidem*: 192). The management was therefore crucially dependent, for the successful outcome of the productive process, on the craft of these skilled workers. In shipbuilding "the plater, one of the boilermaking trades, ... did his job by 'beating down the projecting parts of the edge with his hammer till he considers it sufficient straight, and ... the *degree* of accuracy thus attained is very much at the discretion of the workman' " (*ibidem*: 182).

Despite not concentrating on the introduction of technological innovation, the employers and their management endeavoured to introduce changes into the organisation of work of engineering and shipbuilding. Highlighting those initiatives for change which encountered the resistance of skilled workers during the decades after 1850, three main directions can be identified within the strategy adopted by management. Firstly, they tried to extend the working time through the 'systematic' utilisation of overtime. Secondly, they attempted to impose piece-work in order to wrest from skilled workers the control of the relation between performance and compensation. Lastly, they endeavoured to employ unapprenticed men on jobs reserved to skilled workers (see Burgess 1975: 38-9).

At one Oldham firm, "one of the largest engineering firms in the world", consisting of two plants for the production of textile machines, a controversy broke out in 1851, with engineers opposing the changes introduced by the management over these three

issues. It "led to a large-scale confrontation between employers and workers in the industry" when employers decided to lock out the workers nation-wide at the beginning of 1852, in order to assert managerial prerogatives over the organisation of work. The dispute ended with the engineers' defeat in the next Spring (Burgess 1975: 22-4). From 1850 workers had, in their turn, organised themselves in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE). This was the outcome of a long process, firstly of adapting the organisation of skilled workers to the transformed technological conditions, with the old millwrights accepting fitters and turners in their own organisation since the late 1830s, and then of building up a nation-wide organisation (see *ibidem*: 16-7). Also the trades which were engaged in the manufacturing of boilers for steam engines, such as the platers and the riveters, coalesced into a single organisation, the Boilermakers' Society. In the 1840s it "extended its membership to become, in fact as well as well in aspiration, a national trade union" (Mortimer 1973: 41).

"Generally thought of by contemporaries as 'artisans' and 'mechanics' " like their forefathers, skilled workers however developed a different discourse towards technical progress and industry during their struggle for the control over their own work situation. No accent will be found of the anti-factory discourse which opposed the trade as a natural possession to the artificial character of industry. The latter is instead praised for its capacity of transforming the world and achieving progress. An engineering worker writing in the Newcastle press could express his admiration for the colonisers who "had 'cleared the wild bush and made the desert blossom'", but

also for "the working classes who had built the steam engines" (McClelland 1987: 188). Workers would have apparently shared the celebration, of a manufacturer writing in the *Newcastle Chronicle* in 1861, of 'the spirit and industry of the people' which 'during the last 30 years ... have earned for our country the honour of leading the way in the mechanical science, as well as the more solid advantages of wealth and plenty. Newcastle, more perhaps than any other town, has contributed to this result' (quoted in *ibidem*: 184). Workers, as the *Chainmakers' Journal* in 1858 shows, claimed their important contribution in 'this conquering of the material world, which is the distinguishing characteristic of the civilization that now exists' (quoted in *ibidem*: 196). Thus the principle of totality which was articulated by artisans' discourse and sustained their model of conflict in the first half of the century underwent a mutation. Hence the ASE policy made "no overt attempts to oppose the introduction of labour-saving machines" (Burgess 1975: 18; see also Samuel 1977: 11).

That the acceptance of progress within workers' discourse occurred within the terms which were set by the ideology of their opponents, is a contingent feature of these decades immediately following 1850, which had however far-reaching consequences for the features of workers' action, and particularly for its principle of opposition. The change in the discourse of skilled workers, which was associated with the consolidation of industry, also implied, as Hobsbawm argued, "the *partial* learning of the 'rules of the game' " of middle-class political economy, as far as wage determination is concerned. "Workers learned to regard labour as a commodity to be

sold in the historically peculiar conditions of a free capitalist economy". However, this surrendering was, as Hobsbawm emphasises, not complete. as workers, "when they had any choice in the matter, still fixed the basic asking price and the quality and quantity of work by non-economic criteria" (1968: 345). Sometimes their sharing the discourse of middle-class political economy was due to the adoption of a pragmatic stance. "As the Iron Founders' Society put it, they disliked the laws of political economy but 'as practical men, we must accept the situation, it being out of our power to alter the position at present' " (McClelland 1987: 189). More enthusiastic was the support that the Boilermakers' Society gave to *laissez-faire* policies in international trade. It was linked, on the one hand, to workers' interests in high wages, given the dominating position of British industry in the world market. On the other, it was associated with the progressive discourse about the development of industry and trade, which was couched in very similar terms as Richard Cobden's, the former leader of the Anti-Corn Law League. Thus a link between free trade and international peace was made by the Boilermakers' Society in their 1878 Annual Report, where both "free trade and peace would entail 'the advancement of liberty, justice and equal laws all over the world' " (ibidem: 185).

The conflict that skilled workers structured against their employers, as manifested in disputes which could be local or nation-wide, thus first of all concerned wages. Workers thought, as the secretary of the Tyne and Wear Chain Makers' Union argued in 1861, that 'when trade was prosperous it was the business of workmen to see they enjoyed their share of that prosperity' (quoted in McClelland 1987: 189; see also p.

183). However, skilled workers' action did not express only a logic of interests. Presiding over the whole of their collective action, including their contending for the control over work organisation, was a definition of trade identity which was very similar to the principle of identity of the artisan model of conflict (see above 3-7). Upheld equally by apprenticeship rules, the reproduction of a trade identity depended on the circumstance that "the learning of technical skills was imbricated with the construction of social identities" (McClelland 1987: 192). The distinctive features of artisan culture which were highlighted above, may be applied as well to the skilled factory workers of the decades after 1850: the pride in manual labour and dexterity, the sense of dignity for the independent position they enjoyed within work organisation, the code of honour associated with the loyalty to the trade. Artisan culture was also deeply imbued with a sense of both masculinity and seniority. The completion of apprenticeship indicated the individual's growth "to 'man's stature' ", the accomplishment of "the transition from being one of the 'boys' or 'lads' to being one of 'the men' " (cf. 3-3; Reid 1983: 180; McClelland 1987: 192). Apprentices might be "subjected to sexual humiliation" and they "could taunt each other but not the men, even those who were labourers" (ibidem: 193 and 194). Apprenticeship was a "servitude", "a kind of necessary 'unfreedom' " which could be endured only because temporary (ibidem: 192).

On the basis of their independent position, the sense of separateness *vis-à-vis* those unskilled workers involved in the same productive process, was reproduced during these decades, and likely to a larger extent (see Hobsbawm 1984: 221). The culture of

skilled workers was apparently to think of the working strata as disposed along a ranking of prestige where the main criterion was the degree of autonomy at work. At the lowest rank on the scale were domestic service jobs, "largely of course a woman's occupation". The life of a servant was considered to be 'something like that of a bird shut up in a cage. The bird is well housed and fed but is deprived of liberty'. Thus "factory and other day work" were prized higher. A further distinction of prestige was drawn within the factory and the highest position conferred to the skilled worker was due to his being 'unattached' in terms of work organisation. Thus, as 'a working man' wrote in a 1879 publication: "the attached labourer was 'the servant of many masters, of every artisan in the shop, as well of foremen' and although he might be acknowledged as 'a man' he will not be regarded as either a 'brother' or as an 'equal'". Particularly tense was the relationship in the shipyards between platers and their unskilled helpers throughout the 1870s and the 1880s. One of the helpers' leaders complained that 'the plater was a "taskmaster", the helper a "serf" '. Consequently, "the platers, he said, worked at a high pace in order to give themselves time off from work, which forced the helpers to work both extremely hard and to lose money". Both the cruciality within the labour process and the degree of independence within work organisation were then seen as necessary conditions for a group of workers to be admitted into a trade union. In a controversy developed in the 1860s within the Boilermakers' Society, the admission of the caulkers was being recommended on the grounds that 'if it were not for two Caulkers ships would never float' and that they, "unlike platers' helpers", 'will not in the majority of shops let anyone touch their tools' (McClelland 1987: 202-4).

Coterminous with this trade identity was the belonging to the union. Historians dispute the extent to which the development of a craft identity actually overlapped with the efforts at formal and institutionalised self-organisation. Henry Pelling, in the context of his classical statement against the concept of labour aristocracy, argues that non-union engineers could maintain a level of wages comparable to those of the 'society men' (1968: 50). From a different perspective, Richard Price maintains that skilled workers asserted their power within work organisation together with unskilled workers. This used to occur independently of formal organisation, while it was actually the institutionalisation of workers' solidarities by the Laws on labour in the early 1870s, which undermined or weakened workers' capacity for "autonomous regulation" (1980: in particular 70-78; 93 and 122-30). McClelland's reconstruction of the discourse and culture of engineers and shipyard workers on Tyneside points to a different direction. "The unions thought, and generally correctly, that the overall wage level did not go up unless there was regular trade-unionism", whereas the unskilled labourer was seen as kept 'quiescent' by 'forces of circumstances' (McClelland 1987: 198; cf. Pelling 1968: 57). Thus, in those few cases in which, during these decades, skilled workers showed their solidarity with unskilled labourers, they did it exclusively to those organised in formal unions (cf. the examples in McClelland 1987: 202).

Skilled workers' acceptance of the principle of totality which was propounded by the advocates of *laissez-faire* was seen above. It did not however extend to acceptance of

its individualistic premisses, since a logic of economic rationality did not prevail either in their mutual relationships or in their individual agency within the labour market. In the 1860s individual shipwrights, if unemployed, "would rather become wagon builders, house carpenters or even labourers" than work in a shipyard for an 'unfair', though relatively higher wage. Boilermakers in the 1880s would likewise remain idle rather than accept any wage (McClelland 1987: 199).² Robert Knight, the leader of the Boilermakers, "in commenting on those who regarded their membership simply as a form of individual welfare insurance ... emphasised the origins of trade unionism in mutual help in times of need". He concluded that "we each find our aim and hope fulfilled in no private advantage, but in the good of a great whole", meaning the trade (Reid 1991: 225).

It was seen above that the conflict for the control of work organisation in engineering, which surfaced as a national dispute in 1852, centred on the issues of overtime, piece-work and the manning of customarily skilled jobs. In attempting to control the amount of time to be spent at work, the theme of progress was utilised either to resist management imposition of an extended working time or to claim its reduction. As one unionist commented in a local paper: 'if man is a progressive animal, he must have some time to improve his mind, ... so that he may cultivate his intellectual faculties as a reasonable being, and rise in the scale of creation' (quoted in McClelland 1987: 206). This argument was coupled with the refusal of employers' control over workers' life outside work, for example in religious matters (*ibidem*). Such rejection

² Reid (1983: 177 and 295, note 32) points to the existence of "restrictive practices" also on the part of

of paternalism was extended to factory life where, as Robert Knight put it, 'the day is gone by for workmen to be treated as a mere serf' (quoted in Reid 1991: 227).

The resistance to the introduction of piece-work, which was shared by "most unions, in metals, engineering and shipbuilding" was linked to the defence of the customary work pace, collectively regulated by the trade, and consistent with time-wage. Piece-work was also opposed because it could lead to bad quality output and might open the way for further measures of rationalisation, given that "employers were constantly seeking to reduce the rates" (McClelland 1987: 199). It could also undermine workers' solidarity, a consequence which was all the more intensified by the despised piece-master system, a form of sub-contracting sometimes associated with piece-work, whereby the skilled worker used to hire and supervise the operatives (see *ibidem*: 199-200; Burgess 1975: 20-1).

Given the trade identity which underpinned the action of skilled workers, preventing the entrance of unskilled men into their own jobs meant, first of all, the possibility of contending with the management over the control of all aspects of the work relation, from wages to the organisation of work. To the trade were in fact associated the power to enforce the norms that workers had collectively elaborated, and conversely to resist the assertion of management prerogatives, together with the possibility of controlling the processes of change which were initiated by the organisers of work. By the same token, however, the reproduction of the trade identity prevented the

the labourers who refused to downgraded skilled workers admittance into their own jobs.

development of wider solidarities in the workshop among different trades and particularly with unskilled workers.

The ASE national Executive Council had the task of centrally administering the funds. Belonging to the ASE meant in fact to be granted insurance benefits. Membership grew steadily throughout the 1850s and the 1860s and, together with it, the accumulation of financial resources. In case of strikes no district branch "could spend more than what was contributed by its members ... without the Executive's consent, and branch funds were equalized by the Executive every twelve months" (Burgess 1975: 35 and 21). The 1852 defeat marked the organisational re-structuring of the young national organisation. ASE national leadership became involved mainly in financial administration, whereas the conflict with employers was conducted exclusively at the local level where wages were set and management control of work organisation could be disputed (ibidem: 44 and 39). "This proved a successful tactic", as "it seems that what the ASE had failed to achieve in a direct confrontation with employers during 1851-2 it realized piecemeal in the succeeding decades" (ibidem: 39 and 38).

After 1852 the engineers' leadership increasingly adopted a language of conciliation and mutual understanding between classes, which can partly be explained by its distance from the resistance and the action of the rank-and-file at the local level. For example, in 1867, the ASE President argued that strikes were " 'nothing less than the utter ruin of men, masters and this whole commercial empire', and trade unionists

were warned of the danger" involved, in case "they ignored or opposed 'the principles of true political economy' " (Burgess 1975: 31-2). However, to blame the "evils of bureaucratisation" and contrast it with "a pristine, morally unsullied rank-and-file" is misleading, since "the extent to which these views were shared by the rank and file is difficult to ascertain, but the longevity of trade union office-bearers indicates that the membership was content to re-elect leaders of this ilk" (McClelland 1987: 198; Burgess 1975: 32).

A further change from the time of the full development of the artisan model of conflict, was the fact that the control of work organisation within the factory moved to centre stage in the conflict for the defence of the trade. It was seen above (3-3) that the control of work organisation depended on the control of the labour market in the decades before *circa* 1850, when entrepreneurs were attempting to extend the 'sweated sector' filled with unskilled labourers. In later decades employers' initiatives of rationalisation mainly concerned work organisation, attacking the autonomy of the trade within the factory itself. Consequently the control of, for instance, the manning of jobs within the big plants, became crucial both for safeguarding the skilled worker's autonomy in performing his task, through keeping in check managerial rationalisation of work organisation, and for maintaining the monopoly of labour supply in the labour market and thus controlling wages.

Hence, we still find the Iron Founders' Society complaining "of the corrupting role of 'middlemen and speculators who gamble with the products of millions of toilers' ".

But, as McClelland notes, the definition of the opponent changed from the model of conflict structured by the artisans in the previous decades. Now "it was primarily the direct employer of labour who was the chief enemy" (1987: 195). However, the critique of the employer was cast, as in the old days, in moral and not social terms. Thus Robert Knight could blame the occurrence of strikes on the absence of gentlemanly feelings among employers, some of whom 'were not morally fit for the important post of captains of industry' (quoted in *ibidem*).

As reflected in their discourse, skilled workers did not see themselves as engaged in an antagonistic struggle against their industrial employers, unlike the one that their artisan forefathers had fought against their own opponents. As they had come to endorse a principle of totality based on progress, they had no general view through which to criticise the rationalisation of industry. The model of work conflict decomposed, as the action of skilled workers lost its previous internal consistency among the principles of identity, opposition and totality. Skilled workers struggled against their opponents in the name of the trade, as artisans had done some decades earlier. But they were unable to work out a principle of opposition, on whose basis they could sustain an antagonistic struggle against the employers.

3 - Community and labour action

The case of coal miners will be looked at mainly through the experience of County Durham, which "in the nineteenth century ... was established as the largest, and most productive of the coalfields in Britain" (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 51).³ Miners' unionism emerged powerfully during the second half of the nineteenth century in the context of the sector's growth. Since the early 1830s miners' attempts at self-organisation intertwined with the wider popular movement and Chartism was influential on the push towards nation-wide unionism in the early 1840s. By the early 1850s, however, miners' unionism had been defeated at the local level as well (ibidem: 34-9). In Durham the weakness of miners' action was due to the existence of "the bond", a legal arrangement which tied "miners to their masters for a period of a year". Moreover, it made the hiring at a new colliery dependent on the miner's producing "a certificate of leave from his last master" (ibidem: 29-30). This made it easier for employers to victimise those workers who were more active in attempts at unionising the collieries (ibidem: 33). The emergence of permanent unionism was due in fact to the leadership of a pool of activists who, after having been victimised, endured in their enthusiasm for unionism. All of them were Primitive Methodists who turned themselves into missionaries of miners' self-organisation around the county (ibidem: 46-49 and 34). Miners' collective action was also made difficult by the control that mine-owners had on housing (Beynon and Austrin 1994:32). One of the

³ See Beynon and Austrin 1994: 51 and 91 for data on mining employment in Durham and Britain in

implications of the tied cottage was that Durham miners were obliged to send their fourteen year-old children to pit work, under the threat of being evicted from the colliery house. Moreover, the strike was considered a criminal offence under the Master and Servant Law, while the independent popular press denounced in 1850 that " 'most of the coal proprietors are themselves in the commission of the peace' " (ibidem: 45 and 31; cf. also Pelling 1963: 63-4.).

The discourse developed by the employers in opposing the emergence of unionism employed similies of paternal care and responsibility, conjuring up an image of the local social order based on "kindly feelings" and not to be disrupted by the intrusion of alien agitators (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 33-34). In the county's villages, whose life gravitated around the pits (ibidem: 58 and 167), the employers' control was nearly absolute and one of the main problems for the itinerant union organiser was to find meeting places, as publicans were under the owners' strict dependence. Trade unionism in Durham found its early shelter in the chapels of Primitive Methodism, from where, not accidentally, all its early leaders came (ibidem: 42-3). "Everything that could be collected in the Bible about slavery and tyranny . . . was urged to them" and from their activity in the chapel these activists learned the intellectual and administrative skills necessary for becoming professional union leaders (ibidem: 35 and 49).

The push towards unionisation gained a decisive momentum during the late 1850s

the early 1880s.

and especially during the 1860s. In 1863 the Miners' National Union was created. Its tasks were to diffuse and consolidate the processes of self-organisation at the local level and to put pressure onto the political system, in favour of political reform. In 1860 "coal miners received the statutory right to elect and pay a man of their choosing to check the weights", a recurrent issue of dispute with the employers since payment depended on results. It was around the checkweighman that the local union lodges developed (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 39-41). In 1869 the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) was created and, under the pressure of miners' mobilisation, in 1872 both an Act of Parliament abolished the bond and the DMA was recognised as the miners' legitimate representative in the county coalfield (ibidem: 44-5, 51, 55, 79).⁴ With the National Union engaged in representing miners' interests in the parliamentary group of the Trade Union Congress (see below 4-5), the county-level leaders specialised in collective bargaining over hours, conditions of work and wages (ibidem: 73). The latter issue was, however, soon taken out from the list of the possible contentious matters, given the adoption of the 'sliding scale', a system which linked wage rates to the coal price in the world market (ibidem: 75, 80 and 73).

There was not always consistency between the miners' action in the local collieries and its representation by the county leadership. In 1879 an unofficial strike spread around the county on wages, resulting in the victory of the miners. Though recalcitrant at the onset of the strike, the DMA leadership welcomed the outcome, putting forward the argument that miners' mobilisation, though 'unconstitutional'

⁴ "Soon after the DMA was formed, it created a Franchise Association", with a voluntary contribution

according to the rules of the association, had succeeded in maximising the interests of the workers (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 68-72). The pursuit of self-interest was in fact an important component of miners' organised action. One of the arguments employed by proselytisers during the pre-1872 'stormy epoch' was: 'When eggs are scarce, eggs are dear, when men are scarce, men are dear' (quoted in *ibidem*: 49).

In relation to the owners, the discourse developed by the union leaders made reference to the principle of 'amicability'. The DMA preferred arbitration to strike. In their publications, meant also to instruct contemporary and future unionists, the miners' leaders adopted a tone of "administrative competence and conciliation" (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 64, 66 and 75). The inconsistency between local collective action on the one hand, and its representation and direction on the other, must not be overstressed. The tension revealed in 1879 was transitory as the strike "ushered in a new dawn of co-operative relationships with the employers" (*ibidem*: 74). At the local level miners' discourse did not articulate a perspective of conflict against the employers, as witnessed by the banners of union lodges at the Annual Galas in Durham during the early 1870s. One of them, for instance, represented "Master and Man emblematic of capital and labour, with the words underneath: 'May we ever be united, let us love one another' " (*ibidem*: 209).

The natural condition of mining work favoured the possibility that miners themselves could exercise a relevant control over the work process (see Hinton 1983: 6). The

but the same leadership (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 83).

payment of putters and hewers by weight can also be seen as the only instrument masters had at their disposal to control workers' performance. Through collective bargaining and pressure on the political system, miners were trying to obtain reductions of their working time. Since 1860, as it was anticipated earlier, they had some control on the weighing operation. Parliamentary acts in 1872, 1887 and 1908, gave the miners the right to appoint inspectors in addition to state officials; the latter measures especially related to the ever-incumbent risk of death through isolated incidents or mass disasters (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 116; 94; 97; 122-30). The local trade union lodge also became involved in co-managing "the system of house allocation and tenure" (ibidem: 188-9). The allocation of workers was not in the hands of management either, as hewers used to choose their co-workers and a quarterly drawing of lots was being adopted "to determine the places where the work groups would be employed in the coal mine" (ibidem: 149; see also Hinton 1983: 6).

In the formal terms of a recognised apprenticeship system, the hewers were not skilled workers (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 147). When in 1889 the miners created another national organisation, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), the craft unions looked at it with suspicion if not hostility, because of its smell of unskilled unionism (ibidem: 73). Unlike South Wales, where putters and hewers were in two distinct career paths, in Durham the miner went through a single ladder of progression, from trapping or pumping water, to coal haulage at the age of 16 and then hewing at 21. Thus, as women had been excluded from working underground since the 1842 Mines Act, the distinction among different jobs in mining was only

based on seniority (ibidem: 137-154; 381: note 30; see also Reid 1992: 34).

As recognised by colliery managers, coal cutting involved an "awareness of geology, of the 'feel' of the workplace" and a knowledge of the "ordinary and unspoken features of work in a coal mine", which were "born out of underground experience" (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 147-8). The informal process of training and socialisation was statutorily recognised after 1887, when it was "stipulated two years' experience under skilled supervision before a man was allowed to work alone as a coalgetter" (Arnot 1949: 113). However, in village folk-tales which recounted the great performances of 'big hewers', special emphasis was put on miners' physical strength. There developed in the mining communities, produced in the pits and reproduced through the villages, a "mining culture" which sustained solidarity and thus could be utilised "as a means of resistance" against the domination of the owners. It was underpinned by "an ethic of hard work which was linked to ideas of masculinity, strength and toughness" (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 146; 152-3; see also Thompson 1976: 397). However, unlike skilled workers such as engineers and shipyard workers, it was not a craft identity that upheld miners' action. Together with their crucial position within the organisation of work, coal hewers were "centrally involved in the building of the union", whilst "the DMA was (for 80 years and more) known as the 'hewers' union' " (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 146-7). But the solidarity which grew out of the work process did not exclude the other categories of underground workers, as it is shown by the DMA policy of complete unionisation of the mines. This aim was almost reached at the turn of the century, as culmination of a process of growing

trade union membership which had started with the recognition of 1872 (ibidem: 53).

The union became a powerful and legitimate institution, as symbolised by the imposing presence of the union building in the centre of the county small city (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 53; 80; 82; 53). In the struggle for the loyalty of the miner *vis-à-vis* the owner, villages "polarised" between unionists and non-union men (ibidem: 56-9). In parallel with the growth of trade unionism and fuelling it, to be known as 'good pitmen' also meant to show loyalty to the organisation, to which participation in the 'Store' must be added (ibidem: 194). The outstanding development of the co-operative wing of the union movement was in fact one of the achievements of the Durham experience during these decades, which continued in later ones. "In times of industrial dispute the presence of co-operatives societies was a critical one - through donations to the miners' cause and the provision of credit to its members". Self-interest contributed to providing reasons for individual families to participate in co-operative societies. As a recent commentator has remarked, "the principle of co-operation was to give the members a share in the profits in the form of a dividend. ... This was eagerly looked forward to by miners' wives with large families to cater for" (ibidem: 192-198).

The integration of all Durham miners within the same collective action, institutionally represented by the union, did not however induce the development of a class discourse. In actuality, the union leaders explicitly rejected it (see Beynon and Austrin 1994: 105). The discourse of the DMA leadership, which was not subject to

controversy until the early 1890s, articulated an identity on the basis of the local working community (see *ibidem*: 79). For this reason Durham leaders refused to join the MFGB. The MFGB saw itself as a new departure in mining unionism. Reflecting "the experiences of the less well-organised coalfields", its policy was centred on the integration of mining unionism at a national level on the issue of wages - thus broadening the scope of the MNU policy -, and for the statutory reduction of working hours (cf. Arnot 1949: 149). However, the DMA leaders were reluctant to be involved in national disputes in the event of local attacks by the owners on wages, as made possible by one MFGB rule (*ibidem*: 189 and 108). In addition, by 1889, Durham "hewers had, in effect, established through organisation shorter hours of work than the MFGB were demanding through statute" (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 73; 42, 73 and 147).

The emphasis on the local level by Durham unionism was also favoured by the consequences of the opening of the political system in terms of suffrage extension. It was especially the Third Reform Act of 1884 that made a difference to the miners' possibilities for political representation (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 84). With the widening of the franchise and given the integration achieved among miners, union leaders became MPs and then aldermen and chairmen of the County Council, as soon as the political system was opened at the local level as well (*ibidem*; cf. also Reid 1992: 17).

A new generation of *cadres*, who had grown up as checkweighmen, emerged in the

1890s, and increasingly contested the old guard, which however kept the leadership of the DMA until 1910. They were seeing their local identity as integrated in a nation-wide identity of mining work, and also wanted the latter to be integrated into a common action with the workers of other sectors. They were likewise Primitive Methodists, but had "received their political education" in the socialist Independent Labour Party (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 75, 78, 102-107). When in the years 1900-1908 the debate developed about the possibility for an independent representation of the union movement at the political level, as supported by Socialist societies, Durham union leaders again opposed the local dimension to these processes of integration. One of the leaders of north-eastern unionism had explained in 1872 'the secret of [the miners'] success' : 'they have succeeded because they have looked after their own business, they have sent their own representatives and have not trusted others to look after their own affairs' (quoted in *ibidem*: 95). Here the assertion of autonomy from employers is stretched to entail a refusal to integrate their action with other workers. The lack of reference within their discourse to any perspective of transcending the social order, which is paralleled by their disinterest in articulating arguments of antagonistic conflict, made Durham union leaders happy with being elected into the ranks of an unambiguously non-working class political organisation like the Liberal Party (*ibidem*).

The MFGB did not develop a class discourse either. It rather made reference to an identity of a nation-wide interest group. On the issue of working hours, Socialists had been pushing from the early 1880s within the Trade Union Congress (TUC) for a

policy of general reduction of the working time to eight hours. Indeed, it was "solely with the eight-hour day in mind" that the MFGB decided in 1890 to affiliate to the TUC. The support they gave to socialist delegates and new unskilled unionists at the TUC was contingent on this issue (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 127-30; 138; 146 and 148). In the same year the MFGB deliberated supporting any Parliamentary candidate who would advocate such a measure and it was not until 1908 that it affiliated to the new Labour Party (Arnot 1949: 138 and 148-9; Beynon and Austrin 1994: 102). Their discourse made reference to the specificity of mining work and, traditionally, their claim for the reduction of working hours was cast in terms of mutual convenience with the owners, who would have benefited from restricting production (Arnot 1949: 131 and 144; 125; see also Beynon and Austrin 1994: 101 and 17-8; Hinton 1983: 6).

After the DMA had definitely joined the MFGB in 1908, the Durham division of the Labour Party was inaugurated in 1918 (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 236 and 253). In the early 1890s Durham union leaders "feared the effect upon class harmony of one large miners' organisation. Therefore [they] stood for separateness; and within each separate county for a kindly arrangement with the coal owners" (Arnot 1949: 189). The definition of an identity of the local mining community did not oppose involvement in the rites of Durham high society, of union leaders who were also accepted because they stood as the respectable elite of the miners (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 80-3). In those villages of the county where it has been possible to count them, chapel-going Methodists amounted to only 13% of the population in 1851 (*ibidem*: 49). Union leaders, together with their religious sect, were thus

separated on the issue of drinking from the rest of the community and unionised workers (ibidem: 187). They were elected as managers of co-operatives societies for their being "clearly serious, confident and respectable men" (ibidem: 194). In the photographs and official histories of co-operatives, "they stand out as earnest and respectable, dedicated to the interests of their locality and its people. They are cautious men, but men who support the ideas of trade unionism" (ibidem: 197). It was only at the end of the century that working men's Clubs took root in the county. Here drinking was allowed, although women, who were admitted to chapels, were excluded. From the Clubs a new generation of leaders emerged (ibidem: 198-203).

Thus the experience of miners' collective action contains first of all a logic of interest. This is associated with a logic of action that defines an identity of either a local mining community, like in Durham, or of a distinctive nation-wide occupational group as articulated by the MFGB. Thus, on the one hand, miners' action in these decades can be analytically seen as the decline of workers' action of the first half of the century. Its scope was restricted from 1833, when Bronterre O' Brien could write in the *Poor Man's Guardian*: 'an entire change in society - a change amounting to a complete subversion of the existing "order of the world" - is contemplated by the working classes. They aspire to be at the top instead of at the bottom of society - or rather there should be no bottom or top at all' (quoted in E. P. Thompson 1980: 883). In the loss of a tendency towards the construction of an alternative to social domination, there lies one discontinuity with the labour action of the Chartist times and the artisan experiences of co-operation (Arnot 1949: 53; Beynon and Austrin

1994: 61 and 64; see also note 12). On the other hand, the identity of pitmen, particularly in Durham, did not prevent the development of solidarities between all grades of underground workers. Thus, seen with the hindsight of the model of conflict that will be articulated by class action some decades later, mining experience of action can be seen as preluding the reconstruction of wider solidarities, as part of the triggering process of new dynamics in labour and popular action. Compared with the craft identity of skilled workers such as the engineers, the integration within the same action of all the workers of the same colliery constituted a more fertile soil for the development of a class identity and the reception of socialist propaganda (see Beynon and Austrin 1994: 91, 105 and 5).

But, for the time being, miners' collective action associated a logic of interest with their unwillingness to structure a model of conflict, as either the identity of the local community or of a nation-wide interest group could not mobilised to antagonistically oppose the owners. As the Webbs reproached them, the Durham leaders "adopted the intellectual position of their opponents" (Beynon and Austrin 1994: 80). Consistent with the emphasis on conciliation in relation to their opponents, the discourse of the DMA and MFGB lacked any project for an alternative society. In the 1890s the MFGB advocated the nationalisation of mines, but repudiated Socialism by an overwhelming majority. "Nationalisation in the miners' union at this time was understood not as part of a wider socialist project, but rather as a way of maintaining the industry and trade unionism within it" (ibidem: 101). Nationalisation was not presented as projection of "ideas of power residing 'at the point of the pick' ", but

rather as a measure of rationalisation, responding to the same rationale which sees the Post Office as a state department (ibidem: 146; Arnot 1949: 184).

4 - Weakness and heteronomy

Lancashire was the area of highest concentration of the cotton industry which, by the same token, had an overwhelming dominance within the occupational structure of the region (see Burgess 1975: 235; Joyce 1982: 106-110). The expansion of the cotton industry in the second half of the century changed the conditions for workers' action in a region where, once and again, the popular movement had found one of its most relevant empirical components (see above 3-5). One relevant change in the outlook of cotton workers concerned the attitudes of the former handloom weavers towards machinery and industry. Since the early 1840s the male weaver had overcome his traditional aversion to factory work, on which basis he had taken part in the popular movement of the previous decades (see ibidem). In North Lancashire, at the same time as the weaving industry was expanding enormously, men joined women and children in the operation of powerlooms (Joyce 1982: 57-58). The new attitude can be explained partly as resignation in the face of an actuality which now presented itself as permanent (ibidem: 98; 1992: 100), and partly by generational change, as young people grew up in an environment whose "physical" but also "mental landscape", was "dominated" by the "chimneys of the factory towns" (ibidem: xiii; 55; 172).

The decades after 1850 witnessed a growing self-confidence among employers, with the consolidation of their image as "Captains of Industry" at the level of literary culture and in the provincial press. From the first half of the century the cotton employer had ceased to direct his investment to land, and now was being seen in relation to his workforce as "the master and governor of large masses". Machinery and industry were accorded powerful legitimacy as carriers of a new, superior civilisation, whose benefits were often not considered to be circumscribed, in those decades of "buoyant expansion", to the growth of material wealth (Joyce 1982: 141, 143, 147 and 153). As one employer put it, 'such riches as resulted from a successful business career I consider myself to hold in trust as God's Steward' (quoted in *ibidem*: 141). This image sustained the activity of Nonconformist employers in the North. However, "the imperative of Duty in the Low Church Evangelical Anglicanism of the same region, so much emotionally akin to Nonconformity if so much politically opposed, called with only slightly less emphasis that personal salvation was to be had in the world of works". In more immanent terms, the employer's legitimacy was further enhanced by stressing in public discourse his contribution to national wealth and to the position of supremacy Britain had assumed in international trade (*ibidem* and p. 147).

The old model of conflict that weavers and spinners had contributed to articulate in the earlier decades, together with the other empirical components of labour action, was destructured by this cultural change. The resistance towards industrial

rationalisation lost its general legitimising discourse, once its link to the utopia of self-managed communities of small producers was severed. The old discourse of resisting technical change and the transformation brought about by industry lost its meaning once the factory consolidated and an encompassing world grew around it, as it will be shown soon. Hence, rather than opposing the introduction of new technologies, as they did until Chartist times, workers joined their employer in toasting to the 'Six Motive Powers' at one plant in Blackburn (Joyce 1982: 182).

Losing the consistency that the old principle of totality gave to it, the model of conflict decomposed. Cotton operatives partly developed a new identity. On the one hand, in Lancashire the expansion of villages and town neighbourhoods gravitating around the cotton mills reinforced a sense of local identity along similar lines as in Durham. On the other, workers shared to a certain extent in the work ethic publicly proclaimed by the employers (see also below 4-5). Also for women, who constituted more than half of the total cotton workforce during the two decades after 1850, "working was a source of pride and respectability" (Joyce 1982: 112-3). "There is evidence, for spinners and weavers alike, of a willing acceptance, in the cause of work, of both the rigours of authority and of increased workloads. Ill and injured workers would work flat-out to avoid the stigma of incompetence" (ibidem: 97). Women, however, were more vulnerable to the 'driving' by overlookers, and also because of their "lack of interest in trade unionism" (ibidem: 114 and 101).

Joyce highlights the continuities in the discourse and action of cotton operatives

throughout the century, for example in the development of a moral critique of their employers (see 1992: ch. 4), but also the discontinuity. That moral critique, when placed in the context of the model of social conflict which was articulated by the popular movement from Peterloo to the Plug Riots, sustained an independent action of working people, detectable in the autonomy both of its discourse and political organisation (cf. Joyce 1982: 137). Thus, in parallel with the expansion of factory production, labour action underwent a mutation in the decades that followed the defeat of Chartism. "The principal forms of popular public ritual and ceremony - the banner, the band and the procession", through which Lancashire workers had displayed their participation to the popular movement, "were transformed into expression of inclusion in, and acceptance of, the local and national social order" (ibidem: 185-6; see pp. 183-5 for the operatives' mottoes during the celebration for the birth of one master's son and workers' banners on the occasion of one company outing in 1858). Workers accepted the new worldview of progress (Joyce 1992: 109), but in terms which were subordinate to the discourse of the employers. Former Chartists were praising the employers as 'benefactors' for their activity of investment and rationalisation which was creating 'the most industrial age the world has seen' (quoted in ibidem: 108; 37).

Like miners in Durham, Lancashire cotton workers both developed a sense of local belonging and attached moral meaningfulness to their work experience, the two processes being intertwined given the occupational homogeneity of the neighbourhood and the area. However, cotton workers were, to a lower degree than

miners, capable of developing a principle of opposition in their action based on such an identity. As it was seen above, engineers and boilermakers on Tyneside also lost any sense of being engaged in an antagonistic conflict against their employers. But, in comparison, the experience of cotton workers stands out as peculiarly weak in resisting employers' domination and in attempting to control work organisation (cf. the comment by one Bolton socialist operative in 1899 quoted in Joyce 1982: 90).

What now needs to be reconstructed is the way in which employers were able to widen their control over the lives of their operatives and their families, and to retrace the difficulties cotton workers encountered in the construction of their collective action. Workers' integration within the social order of the factory did not occur along the lines that Manchester advocates of individualistic *laissez-faire* had wished for. In theorising the alliance between workers and manufacturers as productive classes, aimed at spurning "the feudal tie", they envisaged the integration of the individual within modern economy and society to occur as an "independent and self-reliant worker" (Joyce 1982: 135-6). On the contrary, in the Lancashire cotton industry, and to a lesser extent in the woollen industry of the near Yorkshire, the worker's subordination was established rather through the development of a sense of his being a member of the community (ibidem: ch. 3). As one employer put it, 'the bond which united ... [masters and operatives] was not the cold bond of buyer and seller'. Others invoked the classical image of the human body, where each organ is specialised in its function but all work for the same outcome, the workers being the 'hands' who would execute what the 'head' has determined (ibidem: 134 and 139).

It was in the large factory that the model, which Joyce defines as that of paternalism/deference, could develop in full swing. Paternalist practices flowered in the 1850s, successfully responded to crisis in the Cotton Famine of the early 1860s, and by 1870 they were "the everyday practice of the ordinary employer" in Lancashire (Joyce 1982: 152-153). By the third quarter of the century, the continuity of family property had consolidated employers' dynasticism in the large factory, while the size of the average firm was growing in the decades 1850-90 (ibidem: 23; 158-61). The family of the employer used to live close to the operatives and the factory, and "were 'in the habit of familiar intercourse with them' " (ibidem: 26; 144; 164). "The large master successfully combined the element of identification with the necessary element of differentiation. It was the balance between the two which elicited" workers' loyalty and emotional attachment to the factory regime (ibidem: 161). Furthermore, the large company made it easier for the employer to be munificent towards the long-serving employees when they became unproductive in their old age or in case of trade depression (ibidem: 120; 150-1).

Employers' domination was thus not only circumscribed to the workers' life within the factory, but also extended to their time spent outside work. "When the distribution of power in the urban localities is considered, the employers and merchants enjoyed a near-absolute sway in parliamentary politics, as well as in the whole range of municipal affairs, from the town councils to the school board", to the borough magistracies (Joyce 1982: 4). Blackburn is a notable example in this respect, showing

also an almost perfect overlapping of political allegiance with religious denomination (see *ibidem*: 169 and 18). Already in 1853 the operatives of all the great Blackburn factories had gone onto the streets "in the political cause of their employers", but in general workers "had no idea of how the town was governed" (*ibidem*: 150 and 98).

To a decisive extent the factory shaped the physical environment where the operatives led their lives after work. Neighbourhoods were formed by families where all members could be more or less direct employees of the same industrial firm (Joyce 1982: 58; Burgess 1975: 244). This occurred in all types of urban development which accompanied the expansion and concentration of the cotton industry (see Joyce 1982: 153 and 144). Workers then developed a sense of neighbourhood community centred on the factory. Employers' domination was overwhelming in both and then "magnified in the arena of the town", where they provided "civic buildings" and "urban amenities" (Joyce 1982: 37; 168-9). Large employers' intrusion and dominance over the life of the operatives' families, stronger in Lancashire than in the adjacent West Riding, unfolded according to two different "fairly consistent" styles, which depended on the religious worship of the individual cotton lord. Hornby in Blackburn and Mason in Ashton are taken by Joyce as respectively prototypical. The former's Tory voice spoke "of the poor man's right to his glass of beer and his idle pastime". The latter "shared with his fellow employers a notable belief in the saving powers of water, both as a drink and bathed in", that he propagated among his workers, together with other 'improving' precepts (see *ibidem*: 187-8).

The weakness of cotton workers' resistance and action marks the difference between Lancashire experience and that of contemporary Durham miners, where the neighbourhood community revolving around the workplace prevailed as well. From the 1860s Durham miners developed some "response to paternalism", as it was seen in 4-3. The solidarity among colliers which was constructed out of the mining productive process and then reinforced through the neighbourhood, was also utilised as resource to resist employers' domination and to develop autonomous action. On the contrary, what is striking in Lancashire districts during mid-Victorian years, is the degree to which both domination within the factory went unresisted and cotton operatives were unable or unwilling to challenge the employers' dominance over their non-working life, either under the guise of the Non-conformist (moral) stick or the Anglican carrot.⁵

In reconstructing why workers accepted domination under this paternalist form, various reasons need to be taken into account (Joyce 1982: 79; 95). An element of calculation must be taken into account when considering that the participation in the social events organised by the employers meant "the chance of a free meal or a trip" (ibidem: 183). More generally, "paternalism had to deliver the economic goods", namely it "had to support a certain level of wellbeing in order to be effective" (ibidem: 93). As such, it was in danger in times of economic distress. In addition, coercion was never abandoned as a last resort in order to reinforce deference, as

⁵ And circuses: "the gamecock was the century-long symbol of local Toryism" in Blackburn (Joyce 1982: 189). For the different styles of paternalism along political/religious lines concerning munificence and workers' education, see ibidem: 138, 142, 182, 187 and 190

examples of the eviction of dissident workmen from factory housing show (Joyce 1982: 144).⁶ However, workers' subjection to the paternalist regime also involved inward emotion, an affective element that is usually associated with the 'organic' tie (ibidem: 95).

Joyce argues that "it may in fact be that women were a real force in preserving the *status quo* of the deferential relationship" (1982: 115). This remark can be compared with the deep association of the claim for independence with images of masculinity, which was highlighted above in the culture of both craft workers and miners. Women shared an analogous pride to Tyneside skilled workers in "having the 'trade' of weaving to hand". Also analogous was the association between the consequent work ethic and the notion of "respectability", as when in one Yorkshire woollen factory 'the workpeople would not allow anyone with dirty clogs into the factory' (ibidem: 98).⁷ But the attachment to work was translated in the same factory into a workers' answer to the employer's "strictness" which consisted in "the refusal to complain about the long hours of work" (ibidem). Women organised themselves into unions from the early 1890s, thus taking part in the more general process of self-organisation

⁶ Coercion is emphasised by Dutton and King in their study of the weavers' and spinners' struggle of Preston in 1853-4, "for the restoration of the 10 per cent reduction in wages which had been incurred in 1847-8" (1982: in part. pp. 62 and 69). Their reconstruction, is however consistent with Joyce's empirical point about paternalistic practices being most successful and widespread in later years (see ibidem: esp. p. 71). For the continuities of the Preston strikes with the "sturdy tradition of independent working-class radicalism" of the 1830s and 1840s, see ibidem: 68 and 73. Cf. in particular p. 74 for Dutton's and King's argument that the subsequent weakening of cotton workers' action is to be seen in the context of the nation-wide decline of labour action. On the more effective employers' victimisation and state repression of Chartist factory workers, see ibidem: 214 and D. Thompson 1984: 213.

of unskilled workers. In the following decade women's presence was larger both in unionism and in political debate, with Lancashire female workers joining in the mobilisation for women suffrage (Joyce 1982: 115). This process was contemporary with the overlooker's loss of authority over hiring and firing, in a process of change that saw also the re-emergence, after sixty years, of an independent political organisation of the workers (*ibidem*: 103).⁸

However, the capacity for sustaining an autonomous action was low even for male cotton workers when compared with their contemporary counterparts on Tyneside. In weaving "immigrants ... would have come into the factory throughout the second quarter of the century and beyond without the protection and resource of any artisan tradition whatsoever" (*ibidem*: 54). The sizer or taper, "the most skilled and responsible job" which was created by the employers' rationalisation of weaving production, "only superintended what was essentially an automatic process" (Burgess 1975: 237). Conditions for autonomous collective action were certainly more favourable in spinning. To the extent that the spinners were regarded as "the Olympians of the factory" and their union organisation was closed, both their condition and action seemingly resembled the experience of craft workers (Joyce 1982: 66). However, "the development of the self-acting mechanism in the 1820s removed most of the skill from winding the thread on to the mule spindles and regulating their speeds" (Burgess 1975: 236), resulting in the spinners' loss of control

⁷ For a similar example drawn from shipbuilding, see McClelland 1987: 193.

⁸ For other factors which contribute to explaining the growing weakness of paternalism from the early years of the new century, see Joyce 1982: 28 and 118.

over the productive process (Joyce 1982: 55).

In spite of that, the spinner was paid much higher than his senior assistant, the 'big piecer', despite the small difference among the two in terms of skill. As the halting of technological innovation after the 1840s consolidated the spinner's position, employers were willing to grant him superior status. Employers also recognised the principle of seniority for the progression within the spinning team, whose third member was a young 'little piecer' (Burgess 1975: 236-40; Joyce 1982: 55 and 97). During the late nineteenth century the change introduced by employers mainly concerned the intensification of work on the basis of a stable technology, with the addition of spindles and the increased speed of the mule being the most relevant measures adopted (Burgess 1975: 234). As the spinner was paid by the piece, unlike all other jobs in the spinning process and ancillary phases, he was less inclined to resist this kind of change. On the other hand, the spinner was not protected by the skill scarcity which reinforced the cruciality of the engineering and boilermaking trades within their own labour process. Big piecers, given the availability of "large reservoirs of trained labour" in the area, could replace spinners. Furthermore, "in Lancashire even more than elsewhere", the Irish "comprised a pool of often cheaper and unskilled labour", which could swell the ranks of strike-breakers. Women were also potential competitors, despite "the stigma of female labour that existed in the spinning areas" (Joyce 1982: 96 and 113; Fowler and Wyke 1987: 82). In addition, the possible resistance coming from the other categories of operatives was prevented by the employment of the entire family in the different tasks and phases of the

productive process in the same mill; a circumstance which had beneficial effects on the overall income (Burgess 1975: 243-244; see also Gray 1981: 27).

Consequently, bargaining and disputes in the cotton industry mainly concerned wages (Burgess 1975: 237). Compensation rates were collectively negotiated according to price-lists, which were introduced at first in Blackburn weaving in the early 1850s (ibidem: 262-3). 'New Model' employers took the lead for a policy change regarding union recognition, with the employers' press admitting in 1881 that 'the right to combine' has become 'uncontested' (Joyce 1982: 71). Also because international competition increased from the early 1870s, especially in spinning, several employers became convinced "that collective bargaining by representatives of capital and labour led to fewer disputes than individual bargaining on a plant basis" (Burgess 1975: 264, 248-9; Joyce 1982: 67). By the early 1890s unionism organised almost the totality of spinners in Bolton and three quarters in Oldham (Burgess 1975: 265; Joyce 1982: 66). The pattern of negotiation and disputes was seeing employers asking for wage reductions in times of slack trade and the operatives trying to recover after the inversion of the cycle. Estimates show that the increase in the average weekly earnings, during the second half of the century, was disproportionally due to work intensification and increased productivity rather than to increased rates of pay (Fowler and Wyke 1978: 65 and 76; Burgess 1975: 243).

Both spinners' and weavers' unions were organised according to the model of the

amalgamation.⁹ The possibility of influencing the decision-making process within the organisations was biased in favour of professional officials, preventing the emergence of leaders from the resistance and action coming from the workplace (see Burgess: 1975: 254-6 and 258-9). Unofficial disputes indeed sparked at the local level, on issues such as 'bad spinning', or the deterioration of working conditions in weaving (see Burgess 1975: 276-7 and 269; Fowler and Wyke 1978: 101). Around the activity of centralised negotiation a layer of union officials emerged. As the main skill required by them was the technical management of "the intricacies of wage lists", they were selected through "a system of competitive examinations" (Burgess 1975: 249). On the occasion of local disputes, union officials adopted a conciliatory attitude, acting more as mediators than as representatives of workers' collective action (Burgess 1975: 259; Joyce 1982: 66; Fowler and Wyke 1987: 114).¹⁰ As Burgess remarks, the conciliatory machine predisposed by the 1893 Brooklands agreement did not help spinners in contending with their employers over the control of work organisation. The consequence of the complicated procedure was to retard the possible initiative of workers when changes were introduced (Burgess 1975: 283-8; see Fowler and Wyke 1987: 254). The cultural heteronomy of spinning unionism can also be seen from the apparent lack of operatives' reaction when some union leaders, seeing themselves as professionals, could turn into officials of the employers'

⁹ For details on the formation in 1870 of the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners, see Burgess 1975: 255. For the first Amalgamated Association in weaving, established in 1858, and its development by the late 1870s see King 1985: 443.

¹⁰ The mixture of spinners' vulnerability and 'reasonable' attitudes of their leaders can be seen in the Oldham secretary's recommendation to his associates in 1894 " 'to put up with inconvenience and a little abuse' rather than run the risk of losing their employment" (Burgess 1975: 286-7).

association or cotton spinning directors (Joyce 1982: 65; Burgess 1975: 249). This occurred in Bolton, which is one good example in Lancashire of the possible compatibility between a numerically strong unionism and 'deference' (Joyce 1982: 69).¹¹

However rarely, deference could unexpectedly become mass violence, as in the riots that erupted mainly in Blackburn and Preston in 1878, bringing back to memory the 'Plug Strikes' of 1842 (King 1985). Blackburn was seen above as emblematic of both workers' deference to Tory-style paternalism and political heteronomy. The riot, originated from a dispute on a wage reduction in weaving, was ignited both by the employers' intransigence and by a long trade depression (King 1985: 447; 445-6; 440). The "collapse of law and order" included the crowd's stoning of factory windows, clashes with the military, and the looting and burning of the houses of the most hated among the employers. These included Hornby, the Tory MP that workers had been supporting since the 1850s (King 1985: 447-450 and Dutton and King 1982: 70; see also Joyce 1992: 111). According to King, these riots show the persistence of that which was defined above as the 'rough' pole of popular culture (see 3-1, note 5), which was blandished by Tory paternalism, but had also been skirmishing during the whole century against the police over the defence of customary pastimes (King 1985: 468-471). The riot saw a revival of items from the long-standing repertoire of popular rebelliousness such as the burning of effigies and threatening letters (ibidem: 467; 452). Publicans who refused to give free beer were attacked and the crowd

¹¹ See Joyce 1982: 69 for the leader of the local association lamenting that 'sentiment has gone out of

heterogeneously expressed both Tory feelings and references to the Irish struggle (see *ibidem*: 445, 448, 450 and 457).

Contemporary reports suggest the involvement of all popular strata of the factory towns, with a few of the 'aristocratic' spinners included in the list of the arrested (*ibidem*: 458-60). It was a community riot, with the crowd being able to temporarily hold control of territory (Joyce 1992: 112; King 1985: 450). However, weaving unionism was financially weak, supported by a minority of workers, but relief had to be paid to all strikers (King 1985: 462). The crowd leaders did not apparently note that, after two months, solidarity was crumbling (*ibidem*: 456; 441 and 443). However, what is more significant is not the contingency of the workers' defeat, but the ephemeral character of popular mobilisation, since two years later Blackburn people had reverted to their political heteronomy, "almost as if the great strike had never happened" (*ibidem*: 469).

The riot had nonetheless taken the employers as its opponent. This marks a novelty from the time of the Cotton Famine (1861-4), when the less-than-one-week disturbances in 1863 had instead highlighted the Poor Law Guardians, generally drawn from shopkeepers, as targets of popular violence (Kirk 1985: 259-65; Joyce 1982: 151). During the early 1860s, while employers were pushing for a relaxation of the strict application of relief provisions, the action of cotton workers was repositing motifs typical of the old model of conflict. "The failure to provide work

business' with the passing of the private company at the turn of the century.

was often ascribed by operatives to the interference of merchants and other speculating middlemen in the proper working of the market". But that model of conflict had lost consistency and the antagonism of the decades until Chartism had faded away from labour action. As Joyce puts it, "in the attempt to shift the blame for trade difficulties from the employers, and in the frequent joint attempts of masters and men to combat speculation, one working out of the consequences of dependence is clearly apparent" (1982: 99).

5: Political representation

With reference to the experience of skilled engineers and shipyard workers, McClelland highlights the "great achievement" constituted by "the institutions they built". "By 1880, while still facing considerable obstacles, the core of a better organised, more disciplined and more powerful trade-union movement than in any other country had been established" (1987: 209). It is nonetheless possible to speak of an actual decline of labour action after about 1850, in the sense that organised labour reduced the depth of its action, having lost the tendency towards transcending the social order based on domination. Hence, as we saw in 4-2, a logic of social movement was absent in the actual disputes that craft workers were engaged in over wages and the control of work organisation.¹² Skilled workers were unable to

¹² A consequence of the decline of labour action can be seen in the trajectory followed by the co-

elaborate a viable principle of opposition which could take into account the changed context of the employers' activity of rationalisation, now prevalently concerned with attempts at changing work organisation within the factories.

The heirs of the artisans had accepted that "the factory" was 'rational' and 'progressive' ". In Lancashire unions put a "strong emphasis on encouraging technical advance" and gave support to technical education, linking both to "notions of industrial and social progress" (Joyce 1992: 61 and 131). The extent to which all cotton operatives shared in the work ethic of their employers can however be doubted. As one observer argued in 1868, cotton operatives had 'a constant desire to get away from' factory work. On the contrary, for the skilled workers of the North-East, work under the condition of the trade represented a source of more positive identification. As McClelland remarks, "they were not subject to the machine in the way of Lancashire" and some of them were fascinated by technical progress (1987: 205).

For the heirs of the artisans and hand-loom weavers, it made little sense at that point in time to reproduce in their discourse the utopia of a society based on the defence of their customary ways of work and life. Deprived of a principle of totality, workers in

operative wing of the popular movement after about 1850, which is also a further example of institutional growth and consolidation. See Pollard (1967: in part. p. 85) and 3-7 above for the meaning that co-operators attached to their experience in the 1830s. The president of the Pioneers' Society of Rochdale argued in 1860 that the common bond among individuals within the co-operative movement was 'self-interest' and the Rochdale Manufacturing Society was "transformed into a simple profit-making joint-stock society in 1862" (Pollard 1967: 97-100).

mid-Victorian times were unable to work out a critique of industrial employers which could nurture an antagonistic conflict against them. Cotton workers, given their condition of weakness and lack of cultural independence (see above 4-4), could not but praise in their papers the "perseverance, invention and usefulness of the great entrepreneurs" (Joyce 1992: 421, note 69). In Lancashire employers were even welcomed to union meetings (ibidem: 419, note 21). But Tyneside skilled workers, too, were unable to develop an alternative discourse which might challenge employers' domination, even though they retained a decisive control on "how the work was done and the time spent doing it", and, on such a basis, could contest the employers' initiatives for change within work organisation (McClelland 1987: 196; see above 4-2). In the discourse of craft workers on Tyneside, one can discern a consideration for the consequences of their collective action, which is associated with the logic of interests as analytical component part of their actual action. In the mobilisation for the reduction of working hours they stressed their awareness that 'whatever we do which diminishes or stops the flow of ... capital must react with heavy effect upon ourselves'. However, unlike in the labour action of the decades before about 1850 (see above 3-7), that logic of interests was not complemented by a logic of social movement. As the Iron Founders' Society put it in 1880, 'we are desirous to be at peace with capital; the two interests, capital and labour, should work harmoniously together' (quoted in McClelland 1987: 189 and 197).

Their action having lost a logic of social movement, engineers, miners and cotton workers were not seeing their own disputes as component parts of a more general

struggle, in which other popular strata might be involved. Furthermore, in the absence of a structured model of conflict, the decline of labour action, its being confined to further workers' interests on the basis of local or sectional identities, made workers and popular strata lose the tendency towards an independent political standpoint and organisation. The actuality of workers, and popular strata generally, dividing their political support for the Liberal or the Conservative parties in the second half the 19th century, can then be seen as the outcome of the process of disintegration of the popular movement which had fuelled the Chartist wave of protest. In the previous sections we have seen the changes that labour action went through in the decades immediately following the 1848 defeat of the Chartists. We will now follow the changes within the action of popular strata outside the field of work relations, and in relation to the political system in particular.

Whilst some Chartist leaders emigrated, retreated into eccentricity or became politically corrupted,¹³ some others such as Robert Lowery continued to make their presence felt within public debate. Involved at the end of the 1830s in the mobilisation of Newcastle miners within the Chartist movement, Lowery had already started during the early Forties a reflection upon the reasons for Chartist impotence. In those years he became convinced of the necessity of an alliance with the middle strata in order to achieve political reform. He thus found himself close to other splinter groups within the Chartist movement, whose discourse was severing the links between the campaign for universal suffrage and artisan antagonism, thus facilitating

¹³ For such examples see R. Harrison 1965: 20 and 56.

their own convergence with middle-class Radicals such as Cobden and Bright (see B. Harrison and Hollis 1967: 515-6). After a seemingly religious conversion, Lowery intensified his links with the Nonconformist groups which were campaigning for temperance measures to be introduced in order to morally improve the popular strata (B. Harrison and Hollis 1967). On this and other issues, such as secular education and Church disestablishment, religious Dissent renewed with the Liberal Party the alliance it had traditionally maintained with the old Whigs (Bentley 1987: 37-8 and 61; Pugh 1993: 27-8). But to insist on temperance and tee-totalism also implied deepening the rift between the 'rational' and the 'rough' poles of popular culture. On the contrary, the popular movement in its Chartist phase had been able to bridge it, thanks to the integration between the action of artisans, labourers and outcasts, for instance in London during the early Forties (see Joyce 1982: 295 and above 3-6 and 3-7). In fact, riots erupted in Hyde Park against "Sabbatarian attempts to restrict shopping and drinking on Sundays" in 1855 (Hinton 1983: 17; Stedman Jones 1983: 195).

Political reform constituted one important channel through which sections of the popular strata moved their political allegiance to the Liberal Party. Indeed not the whole of the popular strata had retired into political apathy, as was being remarked both in Lancashire and London (see R. Harrison 1965: 19 and Stedman Jones 1983: 214-5). In the second half of the 1860s, popular strata "raised once again the question of their political rights into a great national issue", taking part in mass demonstrations in support of manhood suffrage and the ballot vote (R. Harrison 1965: 80). Since

1865 workers had organised themselves nation-wide through the Reform League, with the bricklayer George Howell as secretary. The leaders of the London-based amalgamated unions, which organised craft workers nation-wide, such as carpenters, bricklayers, engineers and ironfounders, were involved in the parliamentary lobbying and extra-parliamentary agitation for the extension of the franchise. Since 1860 they had set up the London Trades Council in order to bring pressure onto the political system in relation to issues which were essential for the survival and development of unionism as a whole. First of all, the possibility of "conducting strikes without having their members prosecuted on some criminal charge or other" The extension of the right to vote to workingmen was thus seen by trade union leaders mainly as the possibility of increasing their own pressure on parliament in relation to these issues (Pelling 1963: 59-66).

The claim for the widening of the suffrage thus changed its meaning, once it had lost its association with labour antagonism, given the destructuring of the artisan model of conflict and the decline of labour action. As Royden Harrison put it, "whereas Jones' old Chartist comrades had appealed to Trade Unionists on the grounds that universal suffrage was an additional means of 'striking property on the head', the Reform League asked them to support it as a dependable means of their 'rising in the social scale' " (1965: 21). The *Bee-Hive* referred to his readers as 'working bees rejoicing in cheerful labour ... true to their brother bees of every class, and to the Queen Bee on her honoured throne'. It was an influential periodical very close to the London union movement - its editor joined the London Trades Council and other societies in

founding the Trades Union Congress in the years 1868-9 - (Pelling 1963: 71-2; quoted in R. Harrison 1965: 227). Wealthy manufacturers financially supported both the Reform League and the middle-class Reform Union (*ibidem*: 80). Through their Reform Union, liberal Radicals had found another terrain, after the repeal of the Corn laws in 1846, where to pursue their strategy of alliance between the working and middle classes (see Joyce 1982: 323). They were now finding a more sympathetic hearing than in the 1840s among popular strata, attracting sizeable fragments of the erstwhile Chartist movement (Joyce 1992: 50-1 and 53; see above 3-6; McCord 1967 and Joyce 1982: 316). The campaigns of the two organisations were hardly distinguishable (R. Harrison 1965: 80). In fact it was Bright who led the "impressive Reform demonstrations" in the main industrial centres of the North and the Midlands during the winter 1866-7 (*ibidem*: 86).

The Second Reform Act of 1867 almost doubled the electorate, so that "in Britain, apart from Ireland, one adult male in every three could vote" (R. Harrison: 137; Wright 1970: 81). It drew a further wedge, certainly in symbolic terms, between better-off craft workers on the one hand, and unskilled and casual labourers on the other. During the early 1870s various categories of labourers tried to set up union organisations, which however would have waned by the end of the decade (Pelling 1963: 78-83; Hinton 1983: 17-20). Sometimes, as on Tyneside, the issue of political reform represented the occasion for integrating skilled and unskilled workers which were acting separately at the level of civil society (McClelland 1980).¹⁴ In July 1866

¹⁴ Actually, in particular from Tyneside, engineers originated in the early 1870s one attempt of

the crowd engaged in "three days and nights of intermittent skirmishing" when the police prevented entry to Hyde Park for a Reform League demonstration (R. Harrison 1965: 82). But that the Reform League was to a large extent overlapping with the 'respectable' unionism of the Trades Council can be inferred from the circumstance that, in London, only 27 out of 114 branches of the League were located in the East End (ibidem: 118, note 2; Joyce 1992: 53).

Studies on popular culture in mid-Victorian years have cast doubts over the extent to which this organisational gulf between skilled and unskilled workers was actually mirrored in cultural terms. In other terms, whether the split between the 'respectable' and the 'rough' poles of popular culture, that Chartism as a political movement had been able to reduce (see above 3-7), came to be crystallised in the third quarter of the century. Alastair Reid remarks that it would be vain to search for "coherent social strata" created by "matching up forms of employment, levels of wages, cultural pursuits and political views" (1983: 173). Instead, according to James Hinton, unionised craft workers, in participating "in a formidable range of voluntary organisations - co-operatives, adult education institutes, the temperance movement, non conformist chapels", were "cutting themselves off from the street and pub culture of the poor" (Hinton 1983: 8; see also Gray 1981: 35 and 43). C. Tyneside, women's presence in the neighbourhood might have acted as a bridge among different life styles within popular culture. "The sober trade-unionist might go to his building

integrating the action "across trades within an industry" around the reduction of working time; endeavour which spread "elsewhere in the country". However, the Nine Hours' League did not survive "the depression of the later 1870s" (McClelland 1987: 202; Hinton 1983: 17).

society or trade-union meeting, his chapel or working man's club; but his wife's world was centred on the home and the street" (McClelland 1987: 208) Conversely, the burden of maintaining a respectable household did sometimes fall on the shoulders of women. As contemporary observers remarked, "many married women become members [of co-ops] ... in self-defence, to prevent the husbands to spend their money in drink' (quoted in *ibidem*). In discussing the contemporary reconstruction of the outing with his wife and friends of one John Bank, a London railwayman, Bailey (1979) shows how "careful budgeting" and respectable dress were not lived as contradictory with indulging in the booze. The circumstance that quite a few skilled workers did not apparently comply with the precepts of moral improvement, can be evinced from the "persistent complaints by the Boilermakers' Society of men staying away from work to drink". In 1881 "it said that 'stopping off drinking is the greatest evil that our trade and society has to contend against' " (McClelland 1987: 197).

In the London of the last three decades of the century, the reworking by popular strata of their own culture seems to cohere, following Stedman Jones' reconstruction, around a distinct way of life and pattern of leisure. The decay of artisan production that was seen above (4-1), swelled the ranks of those strata who, because of their chronic economic insecurity, developed 'a spirit of speculation or gambling with the future ... rather than ... look[ing] upon himself as "the architect of his fortunes" - trusting to "chance" rather than his own powers and foresight to relieve him at the hour of necessity' (quoted in Stedman Jones 1983: 234). Contemporary observers

noted at the beginning of the new century that in London popular culture - unlike in much of the North - the "central focus was not 'trade unions and friendly societies, co-operative effort, temperance propaganda and politics (including socialism)', but 'pleasure, amusement, hospitality and sport' " (ibidem: 208).¹⁵ Traditional pastimes of rural origin, such as "cock-fighting, bear-baiting and ratting had all but died out" by the beginning of the twentieth century. Already in the late 1860s moral reformers, witnessing the decline of "the cruel animal sports of the eighteenth century", acclaimed the 'present enlightened era' (see ibidem: 202). However, "the old association of holidays with betting, drinking and extravagant expenditure remained strong" (ibidem: 203). The new London popular culture became "a way of life centred round the pub, the race-course and the music hall", with the latter also being attended by highly-paid artisans (ibidem: 215 and 206). The relation with popular action, actual or possible, was this culture's mirroring and, by the same token, reproducing attitudes of escapism from the harsh actuality of daily life and of "estrangement from political activity" (see ibidem: in particular pp. 225 and 182). On the other hand, popular culture in London, with this prevalence of the 'rough' pole, proved to be impervious to the 'improving' attempts by moral reformers from middle-class or religious backgrounds. The rift with the 'rational' pole of popular culture can be seen in the "popularity of music-hall songs extolling the pleasures of drink and

¹⁵ "Joining a friendly society to insure against sickness, medical expenses, unemployment or old age, apart from being enormously expensive for those whose incomes were low or irregular, was too abstract and intangible for families whose whole effort were concentrated on getting through the week ahead without being beset by disaster" (Stedman Jones 1983: 202). For the saving strategies and the terms in which London poor strata maintained an aestheticist reference to respectability, see ibidem: 201.

lampooning teetotalism" (see *ibidem*: 196-8). It was also a political gulf with those workers who were seeing the Liberal Party as the most adequate representative of workingmen's interests. A split which was crystallised by the legislation enacted by Gladstone's first government in the early 1870s under the pressure of the temperance lobby (see Bentley 1987: 61; Joyce 1982: 295 and McWilliam 1998: 94). But, for the time being and despite its autonomy, this popular culture did not nurture in London an independent political action; it did rather come close to Tory upper-class rowdyism. In fact a "second audience for music-hall entertainment ... consisted of sporting aristocrats", colonial officials, white collars and university students (*ibidem*: 230-1). In 1894 "200-300 aristocratic 'rowdies' " rioted against a provision of the London County Council, supported by Liberal and Labour members, to get in one music-hall "a screen erected between the auditorium and the bars, thus fencing off the audience from the provision of drinks and the solicitation of 'prostitutes'" (*ibidem*: 230-3).

However complicated the relationship between the two poles of popular culture and the actual experiences of individuals and groups from the popular strata, the distinction is helpful in explaining political changes within the world of workingmen. The contemporary public sphere showed awareness of the distinction. The debate on political reform was dominated by the theme of respectability. Bright put forward the argument that the right to vote was being denied to the President and the Secretary of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers, men who "were charged with the management of ... enterprises, in which tens of thousands of pounds had been invested". They had been

made in public discourse the champions of the sober and farsighted workingmen (R. Harrison 1965: 114; Joyce 1992: 57-58 and Gray 1981: 41). The "Reform League hedged its demand for Manhood Suffrage with the qualifications 'Registered and Residential' to mark the distinction with "the residuum", namely - as one MP put it - " 'the stalwart navvies with red handkerchiefs who made our railways, ... the hordes of Irish labourers ... that class which, in common Parliamentary language, was designated as the dangerous class' " (R. Harrison 1965: 115 and 117; see also p. 57).

The issue of political reform thus brought the Trades Council and the Reform League into the orbit of the Liberal Party. In the 1868 elections Howell stipulated a secret deal with the Liberal Whip to organise a pool of electoral agents. They were meant to work in the constituencies to prevent independent working-class candidates standing and to concentrate workers' votes on supposedly 'advanced Radical Reformers', who turned out to be, in most cases, old Whigs (R. Harrison 1965: 149 ff. and 208). To Howell it was natural for the union movement to support the Liberals, as he could see no alternative to John Stuart Mill, Gladstone and Bright whom he considered as 'great authorities on politics, taxation and government' (quoted in *ibidem*: 143). Lack of cultural autonomy was indeed not limited to the outlook and discourse of the London-based union leaders. In the early 1890s miners' leaders, who went in delegation to parliament, were flattered by the speech of the 'Grand Old Man' Gladstone on 'the Age of Chivalry and the heroism of the miners' (Arnot 1949: 200; see above 4-3 for the allegiance of mining unionists to the Liberal Party; see also generally Biagini 1991: 158 for workingmen's "trust in the 'People's William' ").

One strand of the disintegrated Chartism, both in terms of political personnel and line of argument - what was defined above as the 'rational' pole of the popular movement (see 3-3) - thus converged with those sections of the middle strata oriented to the Liberal Party "around the central Enlightenment tenets of progress and reason", and in a common struggle "against Privilege" (Joyce 1992: 40 and 61-2; Joyce 1982: 327). The process was facilitated, too, by the "mellowing" of liberal thinking, which in the second half of the century displayed, notably in J. S. Mill, a less intransigent and cynical face than the Manchester School (see Tholfsen 1976: 124 ff.). The trade unions accepted that the government had to pursue a policy of retrenchment in public spending and non interference of the state with the course of the markets (Biagini 1991: 144). But that process of convergence could be actualised only because the discourse of the organised section of the working strata was framing its demands to the political system in terms which now, in the mid-Victorian decades, excluded any reference to antagonistic work conflict.

However, the access of a limited section of the popular strata to the political system, despite occurring within a setting of declining labour action and disintegrated popular movement, irreversibly changed the terms in which the high politics debate was carried out. Despite the limits of the 1867 reform, the electorate rose dramatically in industrial towns such as Blackburn and Newcastle (Pugh 1993: 7-8). As Tories and Liberals had to compete for the votes of popular strata, it was necessary for them to re-structure their internal organisation and to adapt their traditional policies in order

to appeal to the new entrants (see McWilliam 1998: 49). Opening up to the demands coming from the popular strata was also sometimes turned into an opportunity to outbid the rival party or, for a politician, to gain the leadership within either of them.

This had already occurred in 1832 when, with their timid electoral reform, Whigs had been able to interrupt the Tory dominance of the 1820s (Blake 1985: 15-16 and 12; McWilliam 1998: 13). Still at that point in time, "Whigs and Tories were not sharp political divisions but amorphous and overlapping groupings" (Pugh 1993: 15 and 20). After all, 19th-century Whigs and Tories had came out of the same Whig matrix, being the offsprings of a factional split in 1782-4 (Blake 1985: 8 and 15). According to Blake, the political contest until the mid-1860s was a predominantly middle-course policy, which had made the political fortune of liberal Tories in the 1820s, was continued by Peel until 1846 and was then adopted by Palmerston until the discontinuity of the late Sixties (Blake 1985: 25-6 and 88-90). In domestic affairs, it meant a policy which, on the one hand, favoured economic change and industrial growth without interfering with the dynamics of civil society and, on the other, rationalised the organisation of the state.¹⁶ The political prevalence of the landed aristocracy was however left unquestioned nor were its interests seriously jeopardised, whereas the popular strata were devoid of influence and their mobilisation was considered a matter of public order.

Pursuing this policy proved to be more problematic for the Tories. They saw their

¹⁶ For the abolition of the most patent forms of abusing public power in favour of private citizens see

traditionalist wing, firstly, prevailing in the 1830-2 crisis (and causing a Whig landslide victory at the 1832 elections) and, finally in 1846, provoking the split of the Peelite wing from the party on the issue of the repeal of the Corn Laws. Gladstone, who had received his political training under Peel, was among them (Blake 1985: 10-13; 57-9 and 18). After 1846 the Conservatives did not recover effective political power until 1874 (see *ibidem*: 97).¹⁷

The electoral reform of 1867 was the outcome of a surprising alliance of Disraeli's Tories with Radical MPs, which outflanked the even more restricted proposal of the Gladstone's government (R. Harrison 1965: 99 and 134). In the wake of the subsequent elections, the Tories set up a rudimentary party-machine by creating the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (Blake 1985: 114; Pugh 1993: 50). In 1875 Disraeli once again played the card of outflanking Gladstone's Liberals on the route for political change in favour of the demands of popular strata (Spain 1991: 128). His government eventually repealed the Master and Servant Law and modified those measures introduced by the Liberals, which had proved ineffective in facilitating the right to strike (Blake 1985: 123; Pelling 1963: 75-6; Hinton 1983: 21-2; R. Harrison 1965: 290 and 302-5). Disraeli and the Conservative Party continued the discourse of traditional Toryism. It gave a prominent place to "church and state as the embodiments of a nationally unified

Rubinstein, 1983.

¹⁷ See the quotation from Disraeli quoted in Blake 1985: 27 on the anguish of English conservatism in 1844 and his reference to public opinion which his party 'never attempts to form, to educate or to lead'.

people" and saw the party as "the guardians of the pristine British constitution, a constitution suborned by Whig oligarchy in the past and Liberal factionalism in the present" (Joyce 1992: pp. 61-2). But with Disraeli and the later leadership, the Conservative Party also accepted progress, though within the context of traditional institutions. It thus reverted, in this respect, to the Peel's line that Disraeli had so bitterly criticised in the past and had led to the 1846 split (Blake 1985: 118; 123; 162 and 54). Progress was seen "as embodied in the alliance of Tory aristocracy, the commercial middle classes and the workers, an alliance responsible for and embodied in the industrial advance of the nation" (Joyce, 1992: 62; see also 5-1 above).

Pugh designates 1880 as the first truly national electoral campaign, with Gladstone engaged in a national tour for canvassing votes (1993: 3-5). Gladstone had already changed the complexion of his party, so that it is possible to talk of a popular Liberalism to mark the discontinuity with old Whiggism (see Biagini and Reid 1991: 4). Under his leadership, the Liberal Party emerged as a coalition of many "building blocks": the Irish, Nonconformists, middle-class Radicals, organised labour and old Whigs (Pugh 1993: 26-31). The presence of the latter was reduced in the parliamentary party, not only in relative terms, but also because of the decline of agriculture from the late 1870s. Despite that they would still maintain prominence in cabinet posts for a few decades to come (Bentley 1987: 20; Pugh 1993: 24 and 48-9; Blake 1985: 142).

Gladstone's comeback in the late 1870s, after the defeat of his government in 1873,

saw a new activism on humanitarian issues in foreign policy, which also appealed to the Radical "enthusiasm" for the causes of national liberation on the continent. In 1886 Gladstone launched a campaign of public opinion's mobilisation on the Home Rule for Ireland, but this move proved to be fatal to his political destiny (Pugh 1993: 32; Bentley 1987: 65-8; 52-3 and 100-1; Joyce 1992: 46; Beales 1991; McCord 1967: 104-5). A process matured during these years of middle-class sub-urban strata turning away their sympathy from Gladstone's policies and leaning towards the Conservatives. London returned a majority of Conservative seats in all elections from 1885 to 1900 (Blake 1985: 111, 124 and 146; Pugh 1993: 46-7 and 69; Bentley 1987: 72 and 98). In 1886 the Liberal Party loses both its extreme wings: the Whigs and the Chamberlainite Radicals (Bentley 1987: 73). In the previous years Joseph Chamberlain had been criticising Gladstone's policy of retrenchment, on the basis of a programme of state intervention which could improve the conditions of the popular strata, as he had been doing as mayor of Birmingham (Pugh 1993: 35; and especially Bentley 1987: 72-3). To this end he had set up a political machine which could influence opinion in the constituencies and in this way support his bid for the Party leadership; but he did not succeed in his goal (Pugh 1993: 19-20 and 34; Bentley 1987: 64 and 67-8). After the split of Chamberlain's parliamentary wing, the machine became incorporated as the grass-root organisation of the Liberal party (Pugh 1993: 39). After Gladstone's resignation in 1894, the party followed the "New Liberal" route which had been traced by Chamberlain (*ibidem*: 42-3; Bentley 1987: 94-5; 104). In the meantime British liberal thinking was breaking the taboo of *laissez-faire*, coming to endorse a policy of state intervention which might fight social exclusion

and economic poverty (Bentley 1987: 74-82; Pugh 1993: 103 and 114). But by the end of the century the context had also changed at the level of civil society, because the labour movement was growing in quantitative terms and assertiveness. Groups of workers were getting organised for the first time in their sectors and Socialist political groups emerged, criticising the subordination of organised labour to the Liberal Party (see ch. 5 below).

In the late century the Conservative Party intensified its links with the popular strata (see also McWilliam 1998: 93). Pugh attaches great importance to the Primrose League, which, founded in 1883, "entrenched itself in industrial Britain too", on the patriotic catchwords of Empire and unity across the classes (1993: 55). In 1868 the Conservatives had won the elections, among industrial districts, in Cheshire and Lancashire alone, where they were politically exploiting the deference of cotton workers to their employers (Blake 1985: 111; see above 4-4). In a context of political passivity among workers and popular strata in general, elections were a contest between factions of employers, with the workers adhering to the political loyalty of their own employer, often linked to his religious belief (Joyce 1982).¹⁸ In eliciting workers' consent, the Conservatives were also exploiting their acquaintance with the 'rough' pole of popular culture, which it was seen above as connected in Lancashire with the Tory-style paternalism of large employers and in London with aristocratic rowdyism. A Sporting League was formed in the capital with the pledge to the popular strata of fighting all those forces which were 'trying to interfere with the

¹⁸ see Joyce 1982: 205 for a table where the overlapping is shown, in the Blackburn of 1868, between

enjoyment and pleasures of the people'. In the context of the fissure between the 'respectable' and the 'rough' poles of popular culture, Tory upper-class activists might successfully cultivate the myth of "an affinity of outlook between the 'top and the bottom drawer' against the killjoys in between" (Stedman Jones 1983: 233; see also Cunningham 1971: 452-3 and Price 1977: 95-6 and 108). "A formidable catalogue of the poor East End constituencies elected Conservatives in the late nineteenth century" (Pugh 1993: 89). When, around the debate on Bulgaria in 1877-8 and during the Boer War, frenzies of violent "bombastic jingoism" erupted, the London popular strata were not among its promoters, but took part in it, with Radical clubs even being affected (Cunningham 1969; Stedman Jones 1983: 229; 180-1 and 209; Price 1977).

Disraeli secured votes in working-class areas also because he proved to be no more indifferent or hostile than Gladstone to the claims of the labour strata aimed to the political system (cf. Blake 1985: 123; Pugh 1993: 84; Spain 1991: 127). Indeed the politics of interests pursued by workers did not always mean allegiance to the Liberal Party, as it did for those trade unionists who intended to be one pressure-group amongst any other in the Gladstone's coalition. By itself, politics of interests did not foster the political integration of workers and popular strata, as the Conservatives might represent workers as well. Disraeli's party undertook, for instance, the representation of the interests of Sheffield workers who were demanding protection for the cutlery industry, now threatened by German competition (Pugh 1993: 88). The

factory streets, political allegiance of the employer and voting behaviour of the workers/residents.

leader of the cotton spinners was a candidate in 1899 for the Conservatives in Oldham (ibidem: 84). Miscellaneous categories of London workers were inclined to support the Conservatives, for instance watch-makers, munitions workers, dockers and brewery workers, who were interested either in protectionism, or in an aggressive foreign policy, or in halting immigration or opposed the regulatory measures promoted by the Liberals (Stedman Jones 1983: 213).

One of the themes through which the Primrose League organised popular strata within "a frankly hierarchical structure" was 'the Imperial Ascendancy of Great Britain'. The Empire was the card that Disraeli had played in 1872, in his speeches which were also making reference to the 'the elevation of the condition of the people' as 'another great object of the Tory party' (quoted in Alderman 1982: 83-4). Disraeli expressly demarcated his position from Liberal foreign policy, which was wavering between moral crusade and the straightforward defence of British interests (Pugh 1993: 33; Bentley 1987: 70 and 53). He also innovated in relation to a Tory tradition, which from the previous century had been criticising Whig interventionism overseas, because of its links with oligarchic corruption (Blake 1985: 125-6; M. Taylor 1991: 30-1).

Disraeli was capitalising in political terms and reproducing "inchoate, half-romantic, half-predatory emotions and ideas inspired by the idea of Empire" which were making appeal "to British rights that were never defined" and to an "inherent British superiority that was never explained" (Blake 1985: 128 and Price 1977: 95). In the

absence of a wider popular movement, with its autonomous discourse, workers and popular strata either were themselves part of jingoistic crowds, or were unable to put forward any alternative to counteract Disraeli's, and then generally Tory, advocacy of the Empire (Cunningham 1969; Stedman Jones 1983: 180-1). In Chapter Three it was shown that the autonomous discourse of the popular movement was related to the structuring of a conflict, conceived of in antagonistic terms within civil society. Lacking ideational independence in the second half of the nineteenth century, workers might either define their interests, in accordance with their employers, as best represented by the Conservatives, or even be captivated by John Bullish catchwords.

In London some groups of workers supported the Conservatives in the context of the decline of social conflict and the fragmentation of the labour movement into a myriad of sector-wide interests. In Lancashire the Tory appeal to popular strata was channelled mainly through employers' paternalism and the hostility against the Irish.¹⁹ Both dynamics, in Lancashire and London, concern the 'rough' and the 'emotional' poles of popular culture,²⁰ while the 'rational' pole, towards which non-

¹⁹ Lack of space prevents me to deal adequately with the anti-Irish riots which burst, in 1852 and 1868, in many Lancashire towns. The emergence of mobilisations defining the opponent in religious rather than social terms would be contrasted with the convergence which was repeatedly sought or achieved by the Radical and trade union movement in the first half of the century (McWilliam 1998: 87; Belchem 1985: 88-9). These features would be highlighted of anti-Irish hostility: the links between the Orange Order and the Conservative Party; the reference in the Orange discourse to the demands of trade unionism; the resistance of the 'rough' pole to Liberal policies; the competition of Irish immigrants in the lower segments of the labour market, even though the development of an identity of Anglican Englishness would be considered as the distinctive character of the mobilisation (Joyce 1982: 253-61 and 296-7; Kirk 1985: 316-341; Gallagher 1985: 114-6).

²⁰ Liverpool, where Conservative Workingmen's Associations articulated temperance arguments,

conformist workers and respectable trade unionists tended, gravitated towards the Liberal Party. The loss of organisational independence at the political level, of workers and popular strata generally, is accounted for by the lack of autonomy of popular discourse, which was related to the decline of artisan action. Their lack of political unity is to be seen also in the context of this fissure within popular culture, itself exacerbated by the disintegration of the popular movement.

represents one exception (cf. Smith 1984: 48).

CHAPTER FIVE: A NEW POPULAR MOVEMENT

1 - The emergence of socialism

The early discontinuities which point to the construction of a new popular movement occur during the 1880s and the 1890s. They are mainly: a) new political and intellectual developments such as the emergence of Socialist groups; b) the intellectual and political transformation of already-active individuals and pre-existing groups; c) the political activation of young workers onto the terrain of a critique of social order which tends to its transcendence; d) processes of growing self-organisation, within civil society, among some strata of workers who had been passive or heteronomous during the decades of decline of the old popular movement. All these processes will be considered in this chapter. This first section, in particular, follows the thread of the transformation of two broad intellectual currents - Romanticism and Positivism, whose reworking contributes to the development of a critique of social domination. This elaboration helps to define the principle of totality of the model of conflict which will be structured by labour action during the first two decades of the new century (6-1), at a point of higher integration and autonomy for the collective action of popular strata. This contribution involves the redefinition of the notion of progress. From being an argument in support of the processes of change

initiated by management in the factories (see above ch. 4), it is transformed into a critical tool envisaging the construction of an alternative social order, both in workplaces and society as a whole.

In chapter 3 it was shown that the popular movement culminating in Chartism emerged in its fullest strength, indeed acquired a truly national dimension, when it was able to combine the collective action of urban artisans and textile communities of the North. The discourse of Lancashire outworkers opposed the coming of the factory as the prevailing structure of work organisation (see also Berg 1980: ch.10). The mobilisations against the New Poor Law and for the reduction of working hours in cotton factories had prepared the integration of Northern communities within the popular movement in the Chartist decade. They were sustained by a critical discourse, where the ethical relations of local communities were counterposed to the emerging social order of the factory and the workhouse (see 3-5). The utopia of self-managed communities in agriculture and handicrafts was appealing to both urban artisans and decaying textile outworkers (see 3-7). It sustained antagonistic labour action within the popular movement, whereas the prevalent discourse of the latter as a whole was a critique of a political system that was branded as corrupt because it was exclusive. A critical discourse, which overarched both the 'moral' and the 'physical' force options, the constitutional and the insurrectional strategies that were put forward within the debate of the popular movement (cf. 3-4 and 3-7).

In the following decades, workmen abandoned that component of their discourse

which was criticising the emerging industrial order. For the disintegration of the popular movement and the action of the different popular strata losing autonomy, it was decisive that the new factory artisans severed their links with the Romantic critique of industrial society (see E.P. Thompson 1980: 915). As it was shown in 4-2, mid-Victorian skilled engineers were accepting technological innovation, on the basis of their sharing the discourse of progress as propounded by the organisers of their work. They were struggling against their employers on wages and contending for the control of work organisation, but this action was confined to the immanence of pursuing interests, as they did not conceive of this conflict as a challenge to their employers' domination in the factories. Unlike the artisans of the Chartist times who envisaged the utopia of a society without commercial middlemen, mid-Victorian factory artisans did not insert their struggles into a perspective of transcending the social order.

In the 1830s and 1840s, Richard Oastler and John Rayner Stephens had inflamed the people of Yorkshire and Lancashire by thundering against the inhumanity of the factory and the workhouse. The former went "so far as to assert that 'right will only be granted to an armed host of free-men' " (Mendilow 1986: 151-2). As in Cobbett, the critique of the factory was associated with arguments of political self-determination and independence from patronage and deference (see above 3-5). In the decades after 1850, Stephens abandoned this democratic edge to his discourse and sustained a conventional position of popular Toryism (Joyce 1982: 296-7). As a long-term perspective, he dreamed of restoring a social order based on the power of a

responsible aristocracy. In the immediate, he opposed the Liberals because of their resistance to factory legislation in the name of *laissez-faire*, helped by the circumstance that the social opponents of workers in Ashton and Stalybridge were Liberal and Non-conformist (ibidem: 323 and 151). In the same decades, as we saw in 4-5, skilled workers instead joined political forces with the Liberals. They were interested in no state intervention into their disputes and negotiation within civil society. On the one hand, they thought themselves to be strong enough to find it unnecessary. On the other, they no less feared, given their reproduction of an artisan identity in the changed conditions of the factory (see 4-2), the levelling effects of general norms on the distance that they wanted to maintain *vis-à-vis* unskilled labourers.

Moreover in Lancashire, as it was also shown in the last chapter, the emotional impetus springing from the ethical relationships of the community no longer sustained an autonomous popular action. On the contrary, it became the raw material out of which especially, but not only, Tory cotton lords were able to manipulate a workers' consensus supporting their own paternalist style of management. The heirs of handloom workers, too, had come to accept, with more or less enthusiasm, their employers' ideology of progress associated with industrial machinery and work re-organisation aimed at increasing production. Cotton workers felt to be engaged in a common endeavour with the organisers of their work to sustain the prosperity of the trade. They could see no alternative. Thus culturally heteronomous, they were also weaker than skilled engineers and Durham miners in the labour market, for a number

of reasons which have been reconstructed in 4-4. The resistance to the intensification of work was therefore feeble, the autonomy of their institutions thin; in political terms, cotton workers were subordinate to their employers, seen at its highest in Blackburn. In the factory and neighbourhood communities their social life was confined within the immanence of the social order as defined by their employers.

Thus the Romantic critique of British society, increasingly shaped by industry, did not find any immediate resonance in the experience of mid-Victorian workers. The importance of Thomas Carlyle, and the necessity of considering his work here, resides rather in his having developed a host of arguments which, once elaborated by his extremely diverse followers, exerted a very significant impact on political change in Britain. Carlyle's decisive innovation within the British Romantic tradition was the acceptance of the argument of progress (Mendilow 1986: 120). His starting point was a conception of man as "committed to the principle of unceasing creativity" and as an animal who "must affirm life through his activity" (ibidem: 119). This led him "to the conclusion that the index of overall human progress is the degree to which man can shape and control his environment: '... if we consider the interval between the first wooden dibble ... and [the] Liverpool steam-carriages, ... we shall note what progress [man] has made' " (ibidem: 121).

As it was seen in the last chapter, the philosophical discourse of progress had been successfully introduced within British public debate. In the version propounded by Cobden and Bright, progress was conceived of as the unfolding process of spreading

rational conduct in economic affairs, which would have brought in due time wealth and peace to humankind (see above 4-2). Thanks to this process man would actualise his true nature as a commercial animal, a natural process but for the fetters of aristocratic privilege (see Searle 1992: 15), including the denial to the popular strata of their inclusion into the political system. In the late 1860s Bright could, on the basis of this discourse of linear progress (see *ibidem*), successfully appeal to the workers for a common battle against the landed interest and the remnants of feudalism. This argument found acceptance among those strata which were most oriented to a rational conduct of life and closest to the respectable pole of popular culture. However, Bright did not offer to workers any prospect of transcending the social order in the factory and society and, on this basis, to antagonistically struggle against it. The problem for mid-Victorian Radical Liberalism was only to give free rein to the entrepreneurial and instrumentally rational forces within civil society through the retrenchment of the state, as it was exemplarily achieved with the repeal of the Corn Laws.

Carlyle, on the contrary, complemented his progressive philosophy of history with a parallel theory of historical cycles. If man is able to cling to the divine and resist the satanic (both within him), it is thanks to the relation he maintains to 'Ideas' which mediate the living forces of the Universe. But specific, historically-bound Ideas can decline and "the orders of society that derive from" them "will also grow obsolete", up to a point when "the concept of society as a whole is lost and there is no cohesive force to bind its elements into an organic unity. The principle of satanic egotism then takes over". Carlyle thus imagined human history as "a rising spiral". A "cyclical

theory" of youth-maturity-decline of social organisms is coupled with a "linear theory of progression", based on the actuality and further possibility of establishing an "ongoing control over our realities in ever-growing harmony with the unceasing activity of the cosmos" (Mendilow 1986: 119-122).

Carlyle could then articulate his indignation at the present evils of society - particularly "the problem of poverty, especially among urban workers" - within a critique of British modern society. This was based on "the cash-nexus" having replaced "the ties of personal and concrete relationship", and on the alienation of industrial work, the latter critical strand being developed in strikingly similar terms as the young Marx (Mendilow 1986: 138-9). On the basis of his cyclical theory of history, Carlyle could endorse, like Marx, "Southey's definition of his time as prelude 'an important transition in the system which [is] necessary to its development' ", and pointing to "a new harmonious and moral order" (ibidem: 142). "The entire social order must then be replaced" (ibidem: 123). "And there is no time to spare. The Phoenix is ready for rebirth out of the ashes of the past" (ibidem: 131). But such transcending of the present order needs to incorporate the progress achieved by humankind so far. For Carlyle welcomed "the machine as a religious, no less than material, accomplishment. Industry, for him, was the voice of God; the sound of Manchester's thousand mills 'sublime as Niagara or more so'..." (ibidem: 137-8).

This development of British Romanticism marks, according to Mendilow, a distance from its German counterpart, which "sought the way out by a return to the norms and

forms of the pre-industrial past, ... to the static nature of the old agriculturally based society" (1986: 137). At this point of his argument, however, Carlyle's contribution to the development of an autonomous popular movement comes to an end. The remainder of his proposal withdraws hopes in the action of popular strata, to rely instead on the spiritual reformation of the elites: the landed aristocracy and "the Captains of Industry". The latter are "the rising aristocracy of the new civilisation of the machine" and Carlyle called on them likewise to take over the patriarchal responsibilities of the feudal lords of the manor" (ibidem: 144). To mediate between actuality and the transcending of it, Carlyle developed the theme of the Hero, namely the "original symbol-maker" who "arises to replace moribund systems, and one who blazes new trails for society to follow". He "is both a leader of men and an intermediary between them and the creative force of universe". The theory of the hero emerged as one possible answer to the theoretical deadlock over conceiving "the history of man as the changer of nature", and "conversely, ... every individual" as conditioned by "collective symbols ... through education and personal contact" (ibidem: 125). Thus, if the crisis of the age "is the outcome of the discrepancy that had developed between increasing moral degeneration and improving means of production", the solution could not come but from an agent whose "appearance in the world is affected by unknown agencies". His "origins, like those of Jesus and Arthur, are wrapped in mystery" and only him can awaken society "out of its torpor" (ibidem: 137; 126-7 and 130).

The theme of the elites, as elaborated by Carlyle, was further developed by Disraeli in

his Young England phase of the mid-1840s. Disraeli endorsed Carlyle's argument on progress, but his diagnosis of the problem of the age centred on the degradation of the Whig political elite, and its sinking into the pettiness of material and partisan interests. The solution was, in consonance with Carlyle's cyclical theory of history, the coming of a new phase, but this does not transcend the present social order, being rather its re-enchanted confirmation. In Disraeli's project, the political institutions of the English tradition were seen as crucial and for their defence he advocated an alliance between a renewed Toryism and working-class Radicalism. The capital sin for Disraeli is the political revolution which was threatening England's fate, since "man is 'a child of the State and born with filial duties. To disobey the state [is] a crime; to rebel against it treason; to overturn it, parricide' " (Mendilow 1986: 156-169).

Disraeli showed one possible development of the Romantic tradition which contributed to the innovation he would introduce into the politics of the Conservative Party from the 1860s on (see above 4-5). A totally different elaboration is instead carried out by William Morris during the 1880s, which is also to be influential on British political change, though through a diametrically opposite route. Morris's discourse is indeed a contribution to the development of an autonomous movement that will mark a discontinuity in the social and political action of the popular strata, when compared to their mid-Victorian experience. The point of departure in Morris's thinking on the British society of his time is a reflection on the fate of art in modern times, which is induced both by his personal experience as designer and craftsman,

and by the influence of the Romantic art critic John Ruskin. The latter contrasted "Gothic building and medieval society" with 'the prevalent feeling of modern times, which desires to produce the largest results at the least cost' (Mendilow 1986: 184). Hence, the way in which work is organised in modern society sinks human creativity into an abyss of hopeless materiality, thus rendering art impossible.¹ In the wake of the romantic tradition Morris combines a moral and aesthetic critique of present society as based on 'Commercial Profit'. On the one hand, 'the curse of inequality' is created; on the other, factory work levels 'all intelligence and excellence of workmanship by means of machinery' (ibidem: 648; 730; 645; 649).

For Morris the encounter with Marx's work and with the popular mobilisations in the London of the 1880s (see below 5-2), prompts a sharp re-direction of his personal life (cf. E.P. Thompson 1977: 671 and 804-5). From Carlyle and Marx, Morris draws the hope in "the forward movement of modern life". With Marx, Morris argues that 'the future of the world' lies in the workers. This points to a shift in the relative relevance of the different spheres of human activity. Political activity acquires a new centrality in Morris's life, and his thinking on art becomes derivative from it (ibidem: 721; 673). The emergence of a popular movement tending to the transcendence of the present social order, by transforming work and society as a whole, offers art the chance for a new flourishing.

The distance Morris has travelled far from Disraeli's thinking on politics, could not

¹ For Ruskin's critique of modern individualism in relation to art, see E.P. Thompson 1977: 642-6;

be wider. Morris holds an opposite view on the necessity of an autonomous popular movement. This is derived from Ruskin's definition, that Morris endorses, of 'art as man's expression of his joy in labour' (E.P. Thompson 1977: 647 and 655). Thus "the only healthy art is 'an art which is made by the people and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user' " (ibidem: 647). Popular action is thus necessary as it will bring about the transformation of work. The position he then develops towards machinery is ambivalent. Morris makes clear that his solution does not lie in turning 'our people back into Catholic English peasants and Guild craftsmen' (quoted in E.P. Thompson 1977: 654). His preference goes, however, for an organisation of work where the individual man would control machines, in which the "craftsman's 'hand was thinking' " (ibidem: 652-3, but see also 653, note 1). Indeed for Morris, following Marx, the problem is not technical but of critique of the present society. 'It is not this or that tangible steel and brass machine which we want to get rid of, but the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny which oppresses the life of all of us' (quoted in ibidem: 650). The problem is thus postponed to a democratic decision-making process, once work will be free and genuinely co-operative. Then machines, 'on which indeed wonderful ingenuity almost amounting to genius is expended' (quoted in ibidem: 646), will be put at the service of alleviating those kinds of work whose transformation into a source of joy and creativity is most difficult, such as coal-mining (ibidem: 650). The essential point is thus an alternative to the present social order which overturns its power relations, when property will only be personal and not turned 'into an instrument for the oppression of others' (quoted in ibidem:

Mendilow 1986: 183-4.

689). Machines 'are making profits for their owners, and have no time to save the people from drudgery. When the people are their owners - then we shall see' (quoted in *ibidem*: 651).

Morris's innovation within the Romantic critique (see E.P. Thompson 1977: 779) thus rests in this centrality of social and political conflicts, which are concerned with the materiality of the social condition, but at the same time tend to transcend the social order. 'Any one who professes to think that the question of art and cultivation must go before that of the knife and fork ... does not understand what art means' (quoted in *ibidem*: 665). The discontinuity with the Romantic tradition is also on the relationship between the Romantic genius and society; an innovation which precludes any development of the theme of the Hero along the lines of Carlyle's and Disraeli's political theorising (see, for instance, Morris quoted in *ibidem*: 663). The task of socialist intellectuals in relation to the popular movement is not to lead the people but to "educate" their "desire", inspiring them to bear in mind the goal of transcendence while engaged in material struggles (see *ibidem*: 806).

Despite his achievements as a political organiser eventually being poor (see below 5-2), Morris's influence on the emerging socialist movement is notable in many respects. Apparently, he was widely read by workmen.² With his interpretation of socialism he inspires those attempts at creating a network of voluntary associations -

² "In the post-1929 depression" copies of the main Morris's works are reported to be found "in the Tyneside area ... 'in house after house of the miners' even when most of the furniture had been sold off" (E.P. Thompson 1977: 816, note 83).

such as Robert Blatchford's *Clarionettes* -, which imagine themselves to be a living alternative to a society based on competition, inequality and domination (see S. Yeo 1977). They would, in the words of one Morris's contemporary, 'constitute in fact "the New Society" within the framework of the old' (quoted in E.P. Thompson 1977: 714). The ethical quality of the relations between the members of Socialist societies, together with the conflict that they intend to wage against the social order - as Morris puts it in 1885: 'frankness and fraternal trust in each other, and single-hearted devotion to the religion of Socialism'- would enchant actuality even before its transcendence (quoted in S. Yeo 1977: 6).

In the actuality of British experience during the late-Victorian decades, Romantic themes as elaborated by Morris are combined with ascetic Nonconformism and a re-assertion of the work ethic, as it can be seen in pivotal characters for the development of the popular movement such as Tom Mann and Keir Hardie. In the sections 2 and 3 below, this combination will be spelled out, when it will be seen how it comes to define the strand of "ethical socialism", which is a large part of the discourse of the Independent Labour Party (see Hinton 1983: 63). As it will be seen in section 4, this organisation will give during the latest years of the century a decisive contribution in performing the first, even though limited, political integration of what is conceived of as an autonomous popular movement. Socialists like Mann - who expressly calls Carlyle and Ruskin as "teachers ... of 'the modern crusade' (Mendilow 1986: 198) -, Hardie and Blatchford reconfirm Morris's turn of the Romantic tradition in a democratic direction which claims, at odds with both Tory romantics and Whigs,

people's political sovereignty (see Mendilow 1986: 213). From the columns of his *Labour Leader*, Hardie sets himself as the "hero-editor depicted by Carlyle", who awakens the people from their torpor, pointing to instances of injustice and defining the right strategy for the movement (F. Reid 1983). But for him, talking at the Royal Commission on Labour in 1892 as one representative of the miners, 'Socialism is ... the people themselves acting through their organisation, regulating their own affairs industrially as well as otherwise' (Hardie, quoted in S. Yeo 1977: 15). Blatchford, in discussing the problems of internal organisation of the political institution of the popular movement, develops a critique of Carlyle's authoritarianism: 'we must have guides, but we must resist leaders': "the guide points out a direction and recommends others to follow it. The choice must be theirs. He can only explain and persuade" (Mendilow 1986: 213).

"Ethical socialism" can be characterised as an appeal to the "emotional side" of individuals (see S. Yeo 1977: 28), which may be consistent either with the refusal or the advocacy of an ascetic conduct of life,³ and can alternatively be combined with secularism and religious beliefs.⁴ On the one hand, it conquers individuals of "white-collar, professional and business parentage", which for instance form the "core" of the Socialist League, thus intercepting what has been defined as a wide "late-

³ For examples of the former, see Morris quoted in E.P. Thompson 1977: 704 and 691. For examples of the latter see in the next section the influence of Evangelicalism on Hardie in his attitude towards drinking; and the link between temperance and work ethic in Tom Mann.

⁴ For examples of the former see Blatchford in Mendilow 1986: 207 and Morris quoted in E.P. Thompson 1977: 710. For one instance of religious belief combined with socialism, see S. Yeo 1977:

Victorian revolt' among sections of the middle class" (ibidem: 25 and 10). It is also appealing to popular strata, for socialism relates the necessity of autonomous popular action to 'a new hope of relief from the grinding toil and hard struggle which had been their lot' (cf. ibidem: 20 and 53, note 65). The reconstruction of the debate, which develops within this strand of British socialism around the issues of political organisation, will be postponed until section 4. It is now necessary to consider the other main intellectual component of socialist practice in Britain, namely the arguments put forward by the Fabians - and particularly by the most prominent character among them: Sidney Webb (see MacKenzie 1977: 110) -, who ground their advocacy of socialism chiefly with reference to scientific discourse (cf. S. Yeo 1977: 31).

Sidney Webb declares his own conversion to socialism in 1886. This however does not lead him to change his belief in the validity of positivism as the intellectual current which asserts the coincidence between progress, seen as inscribed within the course of history itself,⁵ and the prevalence of science over other forms of knowledge (see Wolfe 1975, esp. pp. 191 and 196). Moral considerations, in the sense of 'the subordination of personal interest to the general good',⁶ are powerfully present in Webb's theoretical and political arguments. They are, however, subsumed within the progressive discourse, along the lines contained in Comte's argument of the parallel

23.

⁵ "What Webb defined as the 'blind social forces ... which went on inexorably working out social salvation' " (MacKenzie 1977: 115).

⁶ For examples see Wolfe 1975: 277; 275 and ibidem: note 69.

growth of science and of altruism in morality (ibidem: 276 and 190-5; cf. also Aron 1965: 93-4). Adhering to Comte's stance, Webb had already moved to a critique of Liberal individualism, which put him in political consonance with the 'New Liberal' tendency, namely the new sense taken by Radicalism after the eclipse of Bright and the electoral reforms of the 1880s. It is possible to talk of New Liberalism to the extent that it constituted a change in the traditionally Liberal policy of state non-intervention into the dynamics of civil society (cf. 4-5 above). The policies advocated by new Radicals such as Joseph Chamberlain assigned new tasks to public power, both at local and national level, in fighting social exclusion and poverty. Also after Chamberlain's break with the party, New Liberalism increasingly appeared as an essential move to counteract socialists and their appeal to workers' support. With his "identification of social progress with an expansion of the role of public authorities", Chamberlain was trying to represent the interests of urban workers within a discourse of promoting equality of opportunity and wealth redistribution (Searle 1992: 24-7). In making reference to workers especially as citizens and urban dwellers, late-Victorian Radicals did not advocate, unlike socialists, workers' control of the economy, and intended to leave untouched both the prerogatives of private industrialists in investment choices, and the control of management over work organisation.

Consistent with his belief in moral progress, Sidney Webb's endorsement of collectivism advocated an extension of the activities of the state, as the latter was considered to be untainted with the particularism of interests within civil society. A pivotal role in 'social reconstruction' was thus assigned on the one hand to

disinterested civil servants, and on the other to social scientists, whose "social research into 'facts' would lead to a scientifically valid policy" (MacKenzie 1977: 250). A potential authoritarian implication can be detected in this line of argument, when "the haggling of parties" is counterposed to a scientific regulation of society and to the extent that "doubt" in the decision-making process is considered "to exist only on such matters where there was ignorance or insufficient evidence" (ibidem). Sidney Webb, together with his wife and intellectual partner Beatrice, later on carries out such a development of the "positivist road to Socialism", at the time of their infatuation for Stalin's Soviet Union (cf. Radice 1984: ch. 14). In the 1880s and 1890s, however, his belief in science and the centrality of "salaried experts"⁷ is not seen in contrast with down-top mechanisms of selecting political elites and procedures for making them accountable to public opinion (see Harrison 2000: 239-40 and 243). Webb restates in 1889 "the Positivist social ideal in democratic terms, giving to elected officeholders the powers that Comte had reserved to a privileged class" (Wolfe 1975: 269 and 267); and sees the coming of mass democracy, unlimited in its reach to male adults at least, as part and parcel of the progressive process (see MacKenzie 1977: 109).

In 1886 Webb has also distanced his position from Comte - with consequences for Webb's relationship to the emerging popular movement - on the issue of the control of the economy. Webb's collectivism, in his Radical phase, still allowed private industrialists to decide on investments, while the state had the task of redistributing

⁷ Cf. also S. Webb quoted in MacKenzie 1977: 62.

wealth through taxation and active social policy. Income redistribution was needed, on the one hand, to allow the weakest among the popular strata - such as the unemployed, the sick and the aged - to share in the material benefits of industrial civilisation; on the other, it was also given the task of 'moralising' the employers. The ideational sources for this last argument were a combination of the asceticism of his Evangelical background and Ricardo's theory of differential rent. As all wealth is socially produced, the state has the right to appropriate the earned income which exceeds the level of subsistence, and to return it for the common good. Webb applied this argument especially to profits as industrial rent, which were said to be legitimately taken by public power to the extent that they were not re-invested for creating employment or modernising the productive process (Wolfe 1975: 198-203). Still in 1885 Webb's stance *vis-à-vis* private industrialists was consistent with the standard Positivist theme of " 'infus[ing] society with social duty from top to bottom', until all capitalists ... acted as disinterested trustees (or civil servants)" (ibidem: 197), and sustained his refusal of state socialism.

In 1886, however, Webb publicly announces his new advocacy of the 'collective control over and ultimate administration of the means of production for public advantage' (Wolfe 1975: 283). He now thinks that progress is being 'too slow' and he is 'by no means sure that the capitalist can be moralised' (quoted in ibidem: 212). State "regulation of industry in the public interest" is thus needed (ibidem). At the same time, however, Webb confirms the distance that his political thinking maintains from other concurrent versions of socialism, emphasising that the process has to be

gradual and along the constitutional avenues which are made possible by the already-opened political system (MacKenzie 1977: 109). And George Bernard Shaw quickly adds, with Webb's consent, that "the 'ultimate administration' of industry might be realized only in the distant future" and indeed " 'literal' public ownership would merely be a burden" (Wolfe 1975: 283-4).

Despite his gradualism putting him at odds with other socialists, this development of Webb's thinking on society contributes to conceiving of the new model of conflict which is being structured by labour action. However, it will be seen later that his representation of the logic of social movement, as one analytical component of labour action, is limited only to the principle of totality, rejecting its other two dimensions (see 5-3). Webb's thinking after his conversion to socialism works in the direction of defining an aim of transcendence for the popular movement, based on the argument that the present "stage of society based upon wage labor" is transitory. Hence "the necessity of moving on to ever 'higher stages of social evolution' " (Wolfe 1975: 212). To the extent that socialism in Webb's version is appealing to 'calm reason' (quoted in *ibidem*: 187) and is putting forward arguments relying on scientific knowledge, a powerful critical tool becomes available to the discourse of labour action and of the popular movement. It makes it possible to turn on its head the capitalist's claim for embodying progress, in whose name he has been counteracting workers' resistance to his domination in the factories. Private industrialists can now be criticised not only because their agency is negating solidarity, but also because it is not rational enough. To the industrialist's quest for efficiency, the worker can retort,

with Webb's approval, that it is the anarchy of market competition which leads to waste.

To the extent that industrialists have been extolling a marvellous future of large factories, machines and systematisation of labour, with their absolute domination over the organisation of work (see Berg 1980: ch. 8), Webb and the workers can envisage a future social order, where production will be equally organised in a rational way and will employ the most modern technology, but without private capitalists. It becomes possible to argue that "the advantages of economic centralization", "the efficiency made possible by mass production", "the concentration of capital", can all be further increased by getting rid of the private control of industry and replacing market competition with planning (see Wolfe 1975: 268). At the end of evolution, man will be 'just as able to control society for his own good as he has been able to control other parts of nature', as one Fabian says in 1887 (quoted in *ibidem*: 271). Some workers might also think that the capitalist utopia of the factory system as 'the greater minister of civilisation to the terraqueous globe', with the single factory becoming 'a vast automaton ... subordinated to a self regulated moving force' (Ure quoted in Mendilow 1986: 6 and in Berg 1980: 199), can be envisaged with the "complete control of production in" their hands and not of capitalist managers.⁸ This is not Webb's conclusion. However, to the extent that skilled workers, for instance in

⁸ The link between technological innovation, rationalisation of the labour process and the crushing of workers' resistance and autonomous action can be found, as Berg shows, in the literature of technologists and management thinkers of the first half of the 19th century. Berg also remarks that the thinking of Utilitarians on the factory developed along similar lines (1980: 201).

engineering, might be resisting the employers' attempts at reducing their own control of work organisation, they can now articulate within their discourse the utopia of an emancipated society, which claims to be more efficient and progressive than the capitalist control over the factory and the economy. That in order to utter this claim, craft engineers will have to construct a definition of class for their action, and can no longer speak in the name of an aristocratic stratum of workers., will be seen below in section 6-1. In defining workers' control of the factory as a 'shibboleth' in 1918 (quoted in Wolfe 1975: 282), Webb reaffirms that matters of work organisation and choices of investments are to be left to managers as civil servants, supported by objective science⁹ and no longer dependent on 'selfish' capitalists (see MacKenzie 1977:251).

It can now be seen how both ethical and positivist socialism contribute to defining the principle of totality of the model of conflict upon which labour action was being structured from the late 1880s in Britain. The idea of a new society, overcoming capitalist control of the economy, is common to all socialists, overarching both proposals for the nationalisation of industry and workers' self-management. Ethical socialists can converge with positivists because their discourse, too, possesses a sense of the "forward movement of modern life", as we have seen in Morris, namely that "the hidden hand working 'Towards Revolution' was history" (E.P. Thompson 1977: 721; S. Yeo 1977: 21).¹⁰ However, they differ in many respects. Anti-asceticism is

⁹ Webb's distrust for the haphazard outcomes of work conflict is at the root of his disagreement with Marx's theory of class struggle (see MacKenzie 1977: 109).

¹⁰ Morris and the Webbs also share a common reference to "a peculiarly English tradition" that they try

the mainspring of Morris's thinking, as it was suggested above, but is by no means common to all the leaders who can be conveniently regrouped under the label of ethical socialists. For Morris, 'the great-motive of change' is 'the longing for freedom and equality akin if you please to the unreasonable passion of the lover'. Sidney Webb, on the contrary, urges 'the disregard of one's own impulses', given that 'the perfectly socialised man puts constraints on himself in every direction' (S. Yeo 1977: 9; Wolfe 1975: 276-79).¹¹ For Webb, as for Comte, "the glorious future [which] awaited all mankind" is "the result of its journey to scientific maturity" (Wolfe 1975: 196). Instead, to Blatchford, the certainty of a socialist future 'of man without a master and earth without a strife' is a feeling, which is inspired by the enthusiasm at the sight of popular strata getting self-organised in autonomous forms (see S. Yeo 1977: 8; 13; 20-1). To the extent that Sidney Webb can cite 'endless instances of public regulations ..., in lists that often extended over a page', to show that British society is already on its way to collectivism, he can envisage a process which would be gradual and needed only an expeditious guidance (see Wolfe 1975: 274 and 271). On the other hand, insofar as the future is conceived of as a negation of the present state of society, change is thought of as a "qualitative leap". In Morris the advocacy of 'class-war' is the consequence of this position, which upholds his disregard for the actual opening up of the political system (E. P. Thompson 1977: 682-3 and 799). This does entail a perspective of violent confrontation with the state, whereas Hardie and

to appropriate on behalf of the socialist movement, and which is combined with their common reference to the universalism of progress, and in Morris also with outspoken internationalism. See Stapleton 1991 and E.P. Thompson 1977: 684 and 728.

¹¹ Morris, however, also speaks of 'sacrifices' endured in 'obedience to the necessities of the Cause' (S. Yeo 1977: 16).

Blatchford, as well as Webb, deny both antagonistic work conflict and the recourse to violence (see below 5-3 and 5-4).

Yet, however different their respective appeals, both ethical and positivist socialism contribute to give to workers' action a perspective of transcending the present social order. Workers can claim to be furthering not their own particular interests but that they are striving, in aspiring to "labour emancipation", for a "soon-to-be-realised social order" which promises to be beneficial to all social strata. In structuring a model of conflict on such a basis, they put the issues of industrial work and the material conditions of the urban popular strata at centre-stage in public debate, partially overshadowing the relevance of issues such as land reform and Home Rule for Ireland.

On the basis of structuring an antagonistic conflict at the level of civil society (see below 5-2 and 6-1), labour action will be able to sustain an autonomous popular movement. This new movement, because of the principle of totality worked out by socialists, can oppose the control of the economy by private industrialists without rejecting the modernisation of industry. On this basis socialists and the workers put forward their own proposal for resolving one of the issues which is at the heart of the national public debate in the last decades of the nineteenth century: Britain's economic decline. In the Darwinian mould which is customary at the time, the issue is re-phrased as the problem of the survival of the 'socially fittest society' in the "coming world crisis". Webb's stance in 1888 is that "such social fitness would be

determined chiefly by the health, industrial efficiency, and moral solidarity of the nation as a whole" (Wolfe 1975: 280). In this way he is building a bridge between the Fabians and the growing self-organisation of the popular strata which are pursuing their interests in the name of class, as it will be seen below. "Greatly expanded technical education", a "more widely available secondary and university education; sanitary, health, and housing legislation; the eight-hour day, more stringent regulation of factories; free school lunches; public bathhouses" are the items included in the Fabian programme. These measures, which *laissez-faire* Liberals had rather left to market exchanges between individuals, might be seen as the satisfaction of particular interests. Webb, on the contrary, presents them as items of a general perspective of collectivism, which alone can make "England technically and physically 'efficient' enough to compete with the growing industrial power of Germany and America" (ibidem). In this and other ways socialists and the workers will gain a prominent position for themselves in the public debate of the nation. As Sidney Webb writes in 1893 (quoted in S. Yeo 1977: 22), in spite of his preference for the strategy of influencing the elites (see below 5-3):

'the lines of battle are being shifted. The issue cannot longer remain between one capitalist party and another. The political conflicts of the near future will necessarily take place between the party representing property and economic privilege on the one hand, and the party of wage earners on the other. The fundamental principle of the one will be individualism, that of the other will be collectivism'.

2 - The emergence of class identity

This section begins with the attempt to reconstruct the processes occurring during the last two decades of the 19th century which lead to the formation of a new popular movement. The analysis will adopt the same lines which have been followed when the popular movement of the first half of the century was investigated (see chapter 3). The autonomy of the popular movement, of its discourse and institutions, will be related to the structuration of a model of antagonistic conflict at the level of civil society, whose actuality will emerge more full-fledgedly in the early decades of the new century (see below 6-1). This conflict once again concerns work relations, as it was for the artisan conflict of the first half of the century. However, as it has been partly shown in the previous section, it is necessary to talk of a new popular movement, because the dimensions of the model of conflict - the principles of identity, opposition and totality (see above 3-1) -, change their content. Moreover, the social conflict which is structured by labour action acquires a higher prominence in the new popular movement than it did during the Chartist decade. Consequently, already from the 1880s and until about the 1920s when this investigation will end, 'popular movement' and 'labour movement' can be utilised as interchangeable terms in a way which was problematic for Chartism, as it is witnessed by the historiographical controversies that were discussed earlier (see 3-7). The new popular movement is a labour movement not only for the reason that it is overwhelmingly composed of workers, but also because the other more or less popular strata, such as

professionals, unemployed and unwaged women, join in it on the basis of a reference to some dimension of the model of conflict which is structured by labour action.

In the sections 2, 3 and 4, the actual processes and events which occur during the years 1880-1900 will be considered with the aim of highlighting three phenomena of analytical significance. Firstly, the very process of a mass movement being constructed, with popular strata becoming increasingly involved in the activity of self-organisation in civil society and/or at the political level. Secondly, the definition of a new identity of class in whose name workers act and, thirdly, the political integration of the movement on an autonomous basis. In terms of actual processes and events, the following will be taken as landmarks in this respect: a) the spread of the experience of unionism among previously unorganised and, most significantly, unskilled workers: particularly gasworkers, dockers, and railwaymen (see this section); b) the trajectory of Keir Hardie, from his emergence as leader of the Scottish miners, to his conversion to Socialism and the delineation of an effective strategy for independent political representation (5-3); c) the sustained series of mobilisations in Yorkshire, involving both Socialist activists and labourers especially from the woollen industry; d) the formation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893, which is seen by its promoters as the political institution of the popular movement; e) the expansion of unionism as a whole, with the growth of traditional unions such as the ASE and the already-mentioned creation of the MFGB; f) the debate within the ILP on the issues of constructing both a mass movement and an effective political representation for it; g) the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in

1900, as one decisive turning point for the future change in the British political system (see 5-4 for points from c to g). The debates among the Socialists will also be considered throughout this and the next chapter, particularly those, on the one hand, concerning the stance to be taken in relation to the openings of the institutional system at the political level; and, on the other, about the leadership of the movement as a whole, whether it should be entrusted to institutions at the level of civil society or at the level of the political system.

The contribution of the two Socialist groups which emerged in the London of the early mid -1880s, was not decisive for the construction of the popular movement, their influence having been, when relevant, indirect. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF), created in 1884, was the result of the conversion to Socialism of the Democratic Federation, an umbrella-organisation which had been created by H.M. Hyndman three years earlier, to co-ordinate some of the Radical clubs of London artisans. Activists of the SDF were essential in the mobilisation of the unemployed on an independent basis, claiming 'not charity, but work'. "From its foundation the SDF agitated among unemployed labourers in the East End of London, leading protest marches and deputations to the Boards of Guardians". This phase of London mobilisations, which intertwined with the "campaigning for the right of holding meetings in the East End streets" by a coalition of Socialists, Radicals and Irish, was ended by repression late in 1887 (see Hinton 1983: 43-5). Hyndman's ideology was an odd mixture of Tory Radicalism, old Chartism and a Marxism conceived along hyper-determinist lines. He apparently founded the DF in 1881 after a discussion with

Disraeli to whom he conveyed his concern about the rising masses and the ensuing bloodshed on the fate of Britain (Bevir 1991: 133; see also E.P. Thompson 1961: 69). On the basis of his doctrinaire interpretation of Marx's iron law on wages, Hyndman considered all dynamics of self-organisation and mobilisation occurring within civil society as irremediably tainted with the particularism of interests.¹² When a landmark event such as the London dock strike occurs, the Federation's journal reproaches those SDF activists who have enthusiastically taken a leading role in the mobilisation (see Collins 1971: 52-6). The prevalence which Hyndman's strategy consequently assigned to political action oscillated between a rhetoric of violence (see Morris's comment of 'insane talk' quoted in E.P. Thompson 1961: 68) -, and attempts at finding some space in parliamentary elections for his very thin organisation, which was relying on hidden manoeuvres with the Conservative Party (see Hinton 1983: 42).

The other group, which emerged out of a split with the SDF, had a brief life. The Socialist League was "an ill-assorted bunch held together only by the force of William Morris's personality. ... After 1890, when Morris left, the League ... disappeared into the underworld of London anarchism" (Hinton 1983: 43-4). However ideologically distant from Hyndman, the anarchists showed the same

¹² This position derived from the determinism which is entailed by Hyndman's interpretation of Marxism in a positivist mould. If Socialism was considered to be the necessary outcome of the historical process, paradoxically union struggles would represent a diversion (see Bevir 1991: 134 and Collins 1971: 48). For the further source of such stance to be found in the thought of the old Bronterre O'Brien, cf. Collins 1971: 54-6 and Bevir 1992. For the programme of the Democratic Federation as a list of conventional Radical proposals, see Collins 1971: 57 and Bevir 1992: 216.

incapacity to mediate between the project of transcending the order of society with its relations of domination, and the reference to concrete struggles of popular strata concerning their own material condition. This can be seen from a provincial instance. In Yorkshire, while labourers are acting for the first time on an autonomous basis (see below 5-4), the anarchists of the Socialist League keep themselves aloof (see E.P. Thompson 1971: 301 and the caustic comment by one local Socialist which is quoted on p. 294).

For the development of the popular movement and the definition of the new model of conflict, the task of leadership performed by Socialist activists in the struggles of labourers proves to be more important than the sectarian wrangling among and within the Socialist groups. This occurs both in Yorkshire and in London; in the metropolis both with gasworkers and dockers. In London Will Thorne, a SDF activist, has already been engaged, prior to the wave of mobilisation of the late 1880s, in promoting the self-organisation of the gasworkers. After having won in London the eight-hour day in June 1889, unionism in gasworks successfully spreads "in many provincial towns especially in the North" (Hinton 1983: 48). The gasworkers adopt a novel institutional arrangement which is based on "low entrance fees and subscriptions" - but with no insurance provision - and is open to previously unorganised workers irrespective of their productive sector. The decline of this so-called general unionism proves such an experiment to be ephemeral¹³ and shows its

¹³ On the conditions for the survival of general unionism during the years 1890-1910 and then its unique, if seen in a comparative perspective, development after the wave of unionisation and protest of the early 1910s, see Hobsbawm 1968: 179-203 and 1984: 152-175.

excessive dependence on the exceptionally tight labour market of the late 1880s (ibidem: 49; Pelling 1963: 101-2).

Also dockers' unionism does not survive after 1893. The employers' counter-offensive smashes both the gains that London dockers have achieved with their 'great' five-week strike in 1889 - higher wages, the control of work organisation, the presence of union itself -; and the self-organisation that dockers have also achieved outside London (Lovell 1985: 104; Hinton 1983: 51). However, with its impact on public opinion, the success of the London strike shows to unskilled workers the possibilities inherent to unionisation (Lovell 1985: 101; see p. 100 for the comment by one East End newspaper in 1871 about the 'helpless' weakness of the dockers). Prior to 1889, unionism in the port of London was restricted to islands of "more skilled" stevedovers and other sparse groups of workers (ibidem: 102; Pelling 1963: 98). With the strike, unionisation increases from about 5,000 to 25,000, extending with no distinction of skill and trade. Though unable to preserve the organisational integration which has been reached during the mobilisation, workers are able to impose virtually total control over the access to work in the port (Lovell 1985: 102 and 110-1). On such a basis, they seize the opportunity to dictate the size of the teams and the pace of work (see White 1991: 46 and 39; Hinton 1983: 50). Tom Mann, a SDF activist, is elected president of the Dockers' Union, the new name adopted for the Tea Operatives' Union of Ben Tillett, who is confirmed as secretary of the new organisation: from a few hundred dockers and warehousemen it now numbers 18,000 members (Lovell 1985: 103).

The organisational model adopted by the London branch of dockers under Mann's leadership is neither the traditional union based on belonging to a trade, nor the general unionism promoted by the gasworkers. In order to maintain the informal closed shop and, on this basis, both the collective control over work organisation and wage-rates, Mann closes the ranks of the Dockers' Union to the unemployed (Hinton 1983: 50 and 59). There is also a cultural reason for this decision of 'not extension, but solidification' (see Lovell 1985: 105) of the newly-formed union. Himself an apprenticed engineer (White 1991: 4), Mann repropose the values of positive attachment to work which are proper of the skilled worker. By setting up "a temperance society especially for union members" (White 1991: 41), Mann shows his closeness to the respectable pole of popular culture. At the same time, however, his arguments articulate a notion of working class and no longer of trade. On the basis of this new identity has he successfully pursued the unionisation of the unskilled dockers. On the same assumption, Mann peremptorily puts at the centre of the ASE debate the issue of including unskilled workers in the union. This is the main item of the platform which sustains Mann's challenge to the secretaryship of the ASE only few years later, in 1892.

Through the unions, unskilled workers, who have had a thin tradition of self-organisation so far, learn a 'salutary discipline' (Mann quoted in Torr 1971: 208; White 1991: 49) which makes them act in concert within the work organisation and in union matters generally. It is necessary that "younger (and thus often physically stronger)" individual workers shall not try to alter the pace of work and thus be

played off by the employers' attempts at dividing the workers. Nor small groups of workers, strategically located within the division of labour, shall strike without the support of the centre (White 1991: 47 and 44). Mann is interested in the construction of a popular movement, but centred around the values of industrial work. The Dockers' Union attempts to organise the Kentish agricultural labourers, a traditional reservoir of cheap labour for dock employers. However, they are to be constituted as special branches at the fringe of the union: the solution for them and for relieving the dockers from their pressure is 'small holdings with fair rent' (Lovell 1985: 106; Tsuzuki 1991: 79). The waterside is traditionally being besieged by all sorts of casual labour (see Lovell 1985: 100). In order to justify the union's decision of 'closing the books' Mann argues (quoted in White 1991: 40): 'we are determined to eliminate the riff-raff... We want men who grasp the problem ..., with constant employment which prevents them to become loafers. The other men at the dock must clear off...'. They 'would degrade our union into a gigantic soup-giving charity' he writes in 1890, at a time when the employers 'were taking on non-union men' and he 'was obliged to carry a revolver' (quoted in *ibidem*: 45).

In the perspective envisaged by Mann, the control of work organisation at one specific point of the industry is linked to a claim for power which extends beyond the workplaces. As Tillett proclaims: 'Labour will rule. It becomes us to see the toiler shall rule, not only in the factory, but shall improve until we govern every institution which is for the people' (quoted in Tsuzuki 1991: 74). On the basis of this identity of class, workers claim the overthrow of the relations of domination in the factory and

society as a whole. This is not inconsistent, unlike what we have seen in Hyndman's position, with the pursuit of interests. By the same token, however, workers claim to speak not in the name of particular interests, but relate their claim for power to emancipation for all. As Mann writes in 1890 (quoted in Torr 1971: 205; see also Hobsbawm 1974: 73-4):

'Our ideal is a co-operative commonwealth ... While striving for the ideal . . . we can be continually gaining some advantage for one or other sections of the workers. The abolition of systematic overtime, reduction of working hours, elimination of sweaters, an ever-increasing demand for a more righteous share of the wealth created by Labour - all these are points in our programme, not one of which can be delayed'.

In his written intervention and activity as labour leader, Tom Mann fully pre-figures the new model of conflict, in its dimensions of the principles of identity, opposition and totality. Because of his reference to an utopia which transcends the social order based on domination, the conflict at the level of civil society is conceived of as antagonistic, namely in the last instance as non-negotiable.¹⁴ But the discontinuity with the old model of conflict which was structured by artisans at the level of civil society, stands out in the further following respect, which is related to the new principle of totality. Unlike the - equally antagonistic - artisans of the first half of the century, workers are not defending a customary way of working nor on such a basis are they opposing the rationalisation that the employers and the management intend to

¹⁴ Mann does not see antagonism as contradictory with the institutionalisation of the union presence on the docks. When, in the aftermath of the strike, Mann argues for union recognition by the employers, he intends to institutionalise dockers' control over work organisation rather to allow conflict to be reabsorbed (cf. White 1991: 46 and 48).

impose. The resistance to the employers' imposition on work conditions is the first move towards an action which now accepts the challenge of the rationalisation of the work process through the application of science and technology. As it has been argued in 5-1, management's initiatives for change are upheld by a discourse of progress which makes reference to both the factory and society as a whole. Mann accepts this evolutionist discourse but overturns it by envisaging a further stage in evolution, where the workers will lead work rationalisation and the implementing of technological advances into production. As leader of the dockers, Mann conceives of an alternative rationalisation of the London port, whereby "the newest machinery" is introduced, warehouses are 'scientifically arranged' and 'dock labour, at present disastrously casual, might be so systematized that the dockers would be enable to work just as regularly as railway workers' (Tsuzuki 1991: 91; Mann quoted in White 1991: 62-3).

In these years Mann develops an awareness of what he himself defines as 'the many-sidedness of the industrial movement' (quoted in Torr 1971: 225). His direct contribution to building up a popular movement lies, first of all, in promoting the integration of skilled and unskilled, impossible until the attachment of the skilled worker to his trade makes reference to a craft identity which excludes labourers. He thus takes the dockers to join the London Trades Council, while he attacks both the leadership of the latter and of the ASE for neglecting the task of 'organising the unorganised' (White 1991: 35, 54; Torr 1971: 221). Mann sees the popular movement as centred around class conflict for the control of work organisation, where the

worker finds as its opponent not the commercial middleman of the Chartist artisan (see above 3-3 and 3-7), but the industrial employer and his management. Industry has become the predominant type of activity which underpins the wealth of the country, and the most modern type of activity as well, as its organisation benefits from scientific and technological development. Industrial workers are thus in a position to mount a claim to power in society as a whole, which will stem from the control they are striving to gain within the workplaces.

Consequently, the popular movement is to be organised, in Mann's view, through recognising the leadership of the unions, as the institutional form which represents the power of the workers. The union not only sustains workers' effort for a collective improvement in their condition. It also prepares industrial workers for a future when they will collectively manage their own workplaces. 'Our Trade Unions shall be centres of enlightenment ...' (Mann and Tillett quoted in Torr 1971: 205). 'To hundreds of thousands men ... they are far and away the most valuable of all institutions for gathering knowledge, for imparting information, for discussion of details matters in connections with labour ...' (Mann quoted in White 1991: 60). But this is only the first step on the way towards re-organising society as a whole, overcoming domination from down the specific workplace up to the - at least - national society. In Mann's words, trade unionism is 'the germ of an organisation capable by a full exercise of its industrial, educational and political powers of completely freeing labour and making the worker master of his fate' (quoted in *ibidem*: 208).

Seen in this light, the engineers who have helped Tillett in his work of organising the dockers inhabit a different mental world from the leaders of the once-'new model' unionism. When Mann and John Burns convene at the Trade Union Congress of 1890, the visual contrast between the two generations of union leaders is striking. As reported by John Burns, the old leaders " 'looked like respectable city gentlemen; wore very good coats, large watch-chains and high hats'... [T]he 'new' delegates ... 'looked workmen. They were workers' " (Torr 1971: 205). From a different viewpoint, this contrast reasserts the pride in manual labour which is familiar, as we saw above (4-2), in the culture of skilled workers, and that Mann wants to be extended to unskilled workers. At a reception given by the mayor of Hull, Mann states: 'It is culture we are striving for ... We don't admit that the men of Oxford and Cambridge should have the monopoly of culture ... There is a dignity in labour. We won't talk much about it, we will prove it' (quoted in Tsuzuki 1991: 74).

At the Congress the old guard attacks the Socialist proposal for a statutory eight-hour day. This theme has become at that point in time an issue around which Socialists, new unionists, but also other workers can integrate their action.¹⁵ Cotton workers and miners, despite being oriented in political terms towards the Liberals or the Conservatives, converge on this measure (see above 4-3 and Pelling 1963: 105), which is instead opposed by the majority of the skilled workers represented within the

¹⁵ Around the campaign for the eight-hour day new rituals are introduced, such as the international May Day, which together with new symbols - the red flag - mark the novelty of the emerging popular movement (see Hobsbawm 1984: 66-82).

TUC. Relying on the authority of the 'late John Bright', Howell argues that 'the demand for a legal eight hour day is "the offspring and spawn of feeble minds" transplanted from the continent of Europe...'. The secretary of the London Trades Council attacks new unionism because it relies "upon 'legislation rather than upon combination'; the State 'to do for the individual what the "old trade unionists" contend the men should do by themselves, for themselves The one party seeks to operate politically through legislation, the other by means of liberty and association'. Hence the charge against Socialists and new unionists: their disavowal of the values of 'manhood' and 'self-reliance' which are typical of the skilled worker. Mann's and Tillet's immediate retort is that their leadership has sought to cultivate in their members 'a sturdy spirit of independence' and 'to instil a deep sense of responsibility' (Torr 1971: 202-3).

'The statement that the 'new' trade unionists look to government and legislation is bunkum; the key note is to organise first, and take action in the most effective way so soon as organisation warrants action, instead of specially looking to Government. The lesson is being thoroughly well taught and learned that we must look to ourselves alone, though this of course does not preclude us from exercising our rights of citizenship'.

For workers' action and the popular movement as a whole, political representation is indeed necessary.¹⁶ 'There is an advantage in having a few working men in Parliament', Mann argues. 'They would be specially useful to pilot Labour measures in Committee rooms' (quoted in *ibidem*: 221). But the leadership of the movement

¹⁶ For Mann's position on the issue of 'legalism' vs. 'voluntarism in relation to the eight-hour day, see White 1991: 58.

has to be firmly in the hands of the workers organised in their own unions. Indeed Mann maintains a 'really healthy contempt for Parliamentary institutions' for which he acknowledges Morris's influence on him (Tsuzuki 1991: 74). Their 'pernicious influences' have 'emasculated a dozen or more honest workmen' (White 1991: 56). What is at stake is workers' autonomy, which needs to be preserved from politicians as well: both from within the popular movement itself, where middle-class doctrinaires such as Hyndman or the Fabians claim the leadership for themselves; and from the bourgeois parties. Hence a further feature of the educational task that Mann entrusts to the unions: 'We want to see the necessary economic knowledge imparted in our Labour organisations, so that Labour in the future shall not be made the shuttlecocks of political parties' with all their 'bickering' (quoted in Torr 1971: 205). Thus Mann is more interested in other institutions which, however not immune from the consequences of the decline of labour action (see above ch. 4, note 12), are anyway domains of autonomy, such as the co-operatives (Torr 1971: 223-4). In the same vein he is interested in the practical and theoretical work carried out by the Fabians on local government. Through this political institution poverty can be addressed through taxing the rich (ibidem: 221-2). As we have seen above with reference to agricultural labourers, popular strata other than the industrial workers, such as the unemployed, are considered as components of the popular movement, but it is the unions of industrial workers which should have a position of leadership. They can claim it because they are bearers of an autonomous action which structures an antagonistic conflict against the employers within civil society. It is on the basis of such autonomous action, in Mann's mind, that industrial workers can also claim

independence *vis-à-vis* the political component of the popular movement.

As Richard Price remarks, important experiences of new unionism emerge and coincide with management's growing pressure towards the intensification of work and the rationalisation of the process (see 1985: 136 and 1986: 96). Like the growing nation-wide unionisation of the miners in the same late 1880s, new unionism emerges in productive sectors where labour self-organisation is neither strong nor is based on a trade identity. A most notable experience of this new kind of unionism is the growing self-organisation of railway workers, one of the expanding branches of British economy.¹⁷ Price also highlights a correspondence between *loi* of modernisation of the labour process and the emergence of new unionism (for an example see Price 1986: 115). In general, his argument about the growing self-organisation in traditionally unskilled and unorganised sectors, draws attention to "the emergence of ... semi-skilled strata out of the old general labourer category", which is one of the outcomes of the restructuring of work process in sectors such the docks and gasworks (ibidem; see also Price 1985: 140 and 1986: 119).

New unionism is thus not irreconcilable with processes of creating specialised occupational identities within the division of labour. The growing self-organisation of these strata develops not only because their strategic position is re-inforced, giving them enough occupational stability and control of a scarce skill in the labour market, to make them able to resist employers' domination. But also because such resistance

¹⁷ For data on the increase of the workforce in the railways from 1884 to 1913, see Bagwell 1985: 185.

and action can be developed on the basis of a cultural attachment to their occupation, which is itself built upon their autonomy in the performance of their tasks that goes together with specialisation. That this process occurs in parallel to the "general trend" which has been so far highlighted, namely "the solidarities of class" coming "to dominate the nature of collective action" (see Price 1986: 93 and 128), is paradoxical only if one thinks in terms of the emergence of class discourse as linked to processes of deprivation, either of property or of skill, and not as the will to control one's own work environment, which would have otherwise been absolutely dominated by the organisers of production (for the difference between the stokers in gasworking and the weak match girls see Price 1985: 147 and 139; cf. also Pelling 1963: 97).

The autonomous action of railway workers, too, clusters around the most professional trades such as the engine-drivers and the signalmen (for the autonomy at work of the engine-driver and the changes in the work as well as the growing self-organisation of signalmen, see Price 1986: 121-2 and 1985: 140-1). The development of solidarities within one professional group, however, does not prevent signalmen in 1890 from playing a "leading role ... in the all-grades movement on the Midland Railway" (Price 1986: 122). This process is favoured by the emergence of unions recruiting mainly among labourers, which triggers a competitive dynamics with traditional unionism resulting in growth and changes in the self-organisation of the sector as a whole (see Bagwell 1985: 185, 187 and 191; Hinton 1983: 46).

For railway workers the experience of new unionism means an indisputable growth of autonomy which will eventually, in 1911-3, enforce on their social opponents recognition for their collective representatives (Bagwell 1985: 197-8).¹⁸ The new unionism of railway workers can thus be seen as part of the process of recomposition of a popular movement, to which it contributes through articulating collective action which goes beyond trade identity. The process of amalgamation will neither be short or smooth and in fact engine drivers will always maintain their organisational particularity. In addition, until the wave of protest of the years 1911-14, "a majority of railway workers continued to remain unorganised" (ibidem: 185 and 198). However, already in 1890, the "occupational distinctiveness" of signalmen and engine-drivers reveals itself as non contradictory with the possibility of integrating their action with the railway workers of lower skill, in order to collectively attempt to control the organisation and the conditions of work. As such, the experience of industrial unionism which will start in 1913 with the creation of the National Union of Railwaymen out of the merging of three pre-existing societies, can be seen as the culmination of a process whose pre-figurement can be found in the late 1880s (see ibidem: 197-8). The pride of being a railwayman (for an example see ibidem: 192) becomes non contradictory with the articulation of class identity. Railway workers will firstly be in the forefront of the attempts to create an independent political representation for the labour movement in 1900. Then, in the early 1910s, they will be at the centre of those waves of protest which either articulate a syndicalist discourse or a notion of labour interest as encompassing the sectionalism of particular

¹⁸ For the weakness of early unionism, see Bagwell 1985: 185; Hinton 1983: 46; Price 1985: 141; Price

branches.

3 - Towards political autonomy

After having explored in the last section the dynamics which occur in labour action from the late 1880s and the emergence of new institutions at the level of civil society, the focus in sections 5-3 and 5-4 will be on contemporaneous dynamics of self-organisation by popular strata in urban environments. It will be seen that they result in institutional consolidation at the level of the political system. New developments in labour action will also be considered, whose repercussion is institutional innovation in the political system. Processes of self-organisation both at the urban level and in work relations show the growing autonomy in the action and discourse of popular strata. They can thus be seen as empirical components of the emerging popular movement. The initiatives in creating a new political actor, which will be considered in this and next section, both make reference to this growing autonomy and try to integrate the empirical components of the movement at the political level.

It is not from London, however, that the pressure towards the independent political representation of the emerging popular movement mainly emanates. In the Webbs' and generally Fabian strategy towards collectivism, the self-organisation of popular

1986: 120. For the paternalist tradition of railway management, see Bagwell 1985: 186-7.

strata does not in itself take a central place, as it can be inferred from the reconstruction of their thinking in 5-1 above. This can be related to their explicit aversion to social conflict, ruled out as particularistic and "archaic", therefore to be replaced by scientific analysis whose results are implemented by state intervention (MacKenzie 1977: 250-1). Consistent with the Webbs' argument, no room can be found for class identity as the basis for a kind of action which would push forward social evolution. Hence the Webbs express their disagreement over the proposal, coming from the other Socialists, for the construction of a third party related to the growing autonomy of the popular movement. When steps are made in this direction, both in 1893 and in 1900 (see 5-4 below), the Fabians keep themselves aloof or lukewarm (see *ibidem*: 194-5 and 274-6). The Webbs' strategy is, on the contrary, mainly centred on the 'permeation' of the two traditional parties in order to influence their elite through close contact (see Sidney's quotation in *ibidem*: 62). "All parties would inevitably move towards collectivism; the difference between them would simply be the speed at which they were prepared to accept that social arrangements shall be deliberately based on what are essentially Socialist principles' " (*ibidem*: 109; see also Bevir 1996).

The second avenue utilised by the Webbs grows out of the Fabian Society's involvement in the local politics of London (see MacKenzie 1977: 108). As Clarke (1983) remarks, there are strong affinities between the early Fabians and New Liberal intellectuals, both on a growing state intervention to reduce wealth inequalities, and on a denial of the desirability of class struggle. Therefore, the further strategy pursued

by the Fabians in national politics becomes the attempt to promote a re-alignment of the British political system around the axis individualism/collectivism, with Gladstone and Morley moving to the Right and the formation, on the Left, of an alliance of Radicals, Socialists and Trade Unions (Wolfe 1975: 257 and 312; see also Bevir 1996: 188). In London politics, the coalition of Radicals and Socialists under the label of the Progressive Party is successful. In 1892 Sidney Webb becomes member of the London County Council and then Chairman of its Technical Education Committee, where he pursues a policy which appeals to the interests of the popular strata (MacKenzie 1977: 157-60; Wolfe 1975: 309-12).¹⁹ It is true that "for some of the Fabians at least, reforms were instalments of the general movement of society towards collectivism, while for progressives they were simply measures that were desirable on their own merits" (MacKenzie 1977: 159). However, this might have become a problem to be dealt with later, and maybe "Socialism need never arrive in any full-fledged form" (see Wolfe 1975: 310). Indeed, for the Webbs, the problem of political change does not come forth as related to the growing autonomy of the popular movement, as it is for Tom Mann and - it will be seen soon - for the Socialist activists and leaders emerging from some regions of the North.

The Webbs see the artisans as the social group which can be won to the cause of collectivism (see Wolfe 1975: 259). The world of the artisans is however in decline,

¹⁹ On the favourable conditions in London for the strategy of permeating the Liberal Party through its Radical wing, mainly associated to the presence of artisan clubs, see Hinton 1983: 54-5; Davis 1992; Stedman Jones 1983: 198. On political Liberalism in the London of the mid-1880s, cf. Wolfe 1975: 255-6.

as was argued in the last chapter (4-5), and they are losing any capacity to produce strong and distinctive political action (see also Stedman Jones 1983: 209 and Davis 1992: 113; 117-8; 120-1). At the same time, the pressure towards the political self-organisation of the popular strata, on a basis of autonomy from the two traditional parties, is growing from certain areas where industrial activity is in expansion: Woolwich, West Ham, Poplar, Battersea (Hinton 1983: 55; Stedman Jones 1983: 210). In West Ham and Battersea the first independent Labour MPs are elected (one of them is John Burns) - but without Liberal opposition - in 1892. "In 1898 the first Labour Council, led by the SDF," takes office in West Ham, supported by unskilled workers such as gasworkers and dockers (Hinton 1983: 58 and 61; Pelling 1963: 103; see also Hobsbawm 1974: 134-5).

However, in terms of the metropolis as a whole, the avenue towards the construction of an independent and united political representation for the labour movement will be much longer. The Labour Party will only be constituted in 1914 and Sidney Webb is involved in it only from 1916, a process which culminates in 1919 when the Fabian Society officially becomes 'a constituent of the Labour Party' (McKibbin 1974: 28-30; MacKenzie 1977: 397-8). The Webbs' actual contribution to the development of the popular movement is however precious. Since the early 1890s, Sidney provides the inexperienced Socialists elected in local councils with information and ideas which are drawn from his experience and thinking on institutions (Hinton 1983: 61; MacKenzie 1977: 236). In addition, on the occasion of Beatrice's participation in Royal Commissions, in the mid-1890s and especially in the following decade, they

propose far-reaching measures which anticipate the 1945 welfare state (MacKenzie 1977: 205 and 359; Birch 1974: 25).

Meanwhile it is the North that proves to be decisive for the processes of autonomy and integration of the workers, which occur at the level of the political system. In both Scotland and the West Riding of Yorkshire the pressure for a political representation of the labour movement, to be established on an independent basis from the Liberal Party, grows out of struggles which develop within civil society. Keir Hardie's "conversion to Socialism" is for instance linked to these dynamics. He becomes a pivotal figure in the formative phase which will lead in the new century to the establishment of the Labour Party, firstly as a third party, and then as one of the main parties in a re-constituted two-party political system.

Fred Reid reconstructs Hardie's early experience as organiser and leader of mining unionism in West Scotland during the late 1870s, at a time when he supported the conception of unionism and the policy of the NMU (cf. 4-3 above). This was based, in terms of wage policy, on the sliding scale and contained no criticism of orthodox political economy, while it supported Gladstone's Liberal Party at the level of the political system. The only strategy miners could adopt to control their compensation and defend themselves from the vagaries of the market, was the restriction of output, which however necessitated the miners' collective control over their own performance. Unlike in north-eastern England (see *ibidem*), the pursuit of this strategy was highly problematic for the miners of Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. On the one hand, they lacked control over the labour market, given the pressure of

immigration from Ireland and other areas of Scotland. On the other hand, the coalowners, conditioned by their commercial strategies, decided to refuse recognition to the miners' representatives (F. Reid 1971: 24-30).

The defeat in a dispute during 1879-80 urged Hardie to reflect on how to remedy the weakness of miners' action in West Scotland. Reid discerns a first discontinuity with the dogma of *laissez-faire* in Hardie's stance when, in 1883, he advocated a legal eight-hour day, given the impossibility of pursuing the reduction of working hours through collective bargaining. Consequently, by the mid-Eighties, Hardie found himself close to the Radical wing of the Liberal Party, with its emphasis on growing state intervention. Hardie's change was also influenced by his recovery of strands of argument which had nurtured his intellectual background, namely Carlyle's anti-utilitarianism and the Evangelical view of the state as having a moral function, that he now wanted to be extended from matters of individual morality to issues of economics and labour relations (F. Reid 1971: 31-2).

Temperant like the miners' leaders of Durham, Hardie is oriented towards that pole of popular culture which has been defined as "respectable". The tendency towards a rational conduct of life was powerfully present in his upbringing and was re-activated by his involvement in Evangelical and Congregational groups. As Fred Reid defines it, respectability entailed "a structure of attitudes which stressed personal responsibility for poverty and equated independence with worldly success". The orientation towards respectability in the culture of working people was ambivalent to

the possibilities of collective action. It contained implications which discouraged the development of solidarities among workers, if the aspiration to 'decency' was declined in the terms, prevalent in mid-Victorian Scotland, of family strategies of upward socio-economic mobility and the consequent attempts at severing their links with popular culture. It did mean, however, "a healthy self-respect and assertion of personal worth over external conditions", which might support, as in the north-eastern coalfield, an attachment to independent unionism grounded on the culture of mining communities and led by the moral elite of chapel-goers. This was the side of respectability that Hardie preached to his miners. He thus attached meaningfulness to the mining identity and related self-dignity to the strength of organised labour. Taking Northumberland and Durham as his model, he blamed the workmen for not being "manly" enough to sustain independent unionism. Frustrated as a result of the 1879-80 defeat, Hardie accused the miners, "among which he lived", of not being self-disciplined enough in their pursuit of the strategy of output restriction. In urging independent action on them, Hardie pointed to those aspects of miners' agency - drinking, gambling and unsystematic work - which were in contrast with the possibility of workers' solidarity, to be established down the pits in order to control the amount of production on a collective basis. In pointing to himself as an example, Hardie saw self-improvement as the main pre-condition for breaking that vicious circle of dependence and poverty in which the miners were trapped (F. Reid 1971: 22-3 and 28-9).

As in Durham, the discourse of the NMU combined a pride in mining identity with

setting a limited horizon for the miners' activity of self-organisation, far removed from conceiving of a model of antagonistic conflict from the perspective of overcoming domination (see above 4-3). This was the end-state that Hardie also envisaged for independent unionism: as soon as the miner had managed to self-regulate his behaviour, he would be worth a future of partnership with Capital, a new industrial order to be based on profit-sharing schemes. At the political level, he envisaged a strategy of mining unionism as a pressure group within the Liberal Party, on the basis of a renewed bargain with the Radicals, provided that they supported the eight-hour day through legislation. Admittedly, this demand was a defeat for the miners' spirit of self-reliance, but Hardie saw it as the only way for breaking the vicious circle of miners' subjection (F. Reid 1971: 28-9; 31 and 37-8).

Around the mid-1880s a new popular movement is emerging in Scotland as a whole, in both the mining communities and the urban centres. In the context of land agitations and the repeated miners' attempts at consolidating their self-organisation, associations are emerging "pledged to 'restore' the land to the people of Scotland" and claiming "the nationalisation of mineral royalties and ... the application of the funds to the provision of State insurance for miners". The Marxist ideas of the SDF succeed in capturing the attention of Scottish miners, but within a discourse which emphasises the issue of landed property (F. Reid 1971: 34-6 and F. Reid 1978: 80). In this way Socialism is able to speak to the reason and emotions of Scottish miners, often of rural background. To the extent that they might be prepared to challenge the coal owners' rights to property, miners have to deal more with an issue of land

control than with matters concerning the management of industrial machinery. Hardie initially rejects the Socialists' proposal for independent labour representation. New accents can however be heard in his discourse. When drafting the rules for the Ayrshire Miners' Union in 1886, Hardie writes: 'All wealth is created by Labour. ... [C]apital ... has become the master of its creator. The principles of trade unionism ... aim at a reversal of this order of things' (ibidem: 32-3).

The further change in Hardie's political stance is prompted by dynamics which occur, once again, at the level of civil society. The revamping of mining unionism in the mid-1880s, culminating in the formation of the Scottish Miners' National Federation (SMNF) - with Hardie as secretary -, is interrupted by the state repression which follows a new defeat of Lanarkshire miners in 1886. The employers refuse the traditional proposal made by Hardie of institutionalising unionism and recognising miners' control over production (F. Reid 1971: 38-9). The SMNF's life will be short after the defeat, but confidence in self-organisation is growing and the unionism of Scottish miners will re-emerge with new strength in the early 1890s (F. Reid 1978: 92). It is in this contingency, according to F. Reid's reconstruction, that Hardie conceives of his break with the Liberal Party. He is outraged at the stance taken by the local press against independent unionism, and particularly at the Radical press. Furthermore, the unionist MPs elected in the Liberal Party are lukewarm in supporting legislation for the reduction of working hours (F. Reid 1971: 40-4). Having come in contact with the Socialist circles in London, Hardie becomes convinced of the necessity for independent political representation for the workers. In

1887 at the TUC, he attacks the union leaders politically supporting Liberal industrial magnates (F. Reid 1971: 42-44; see also Shepherd 1991: 196). F. Reid wants to dispel the thesis that the decisive factor which explains Hardie's new political orientation lies in the quarrels within the caucus of Mid-Lanark. Indeed, the Liberals refuse the nomination of a miners' representative for the imminent by-elections in 1888, but Hardie's choice to stand as an independent candidate is not a sudden decision, being rather a "test for the new strategy already worked out in his mind" (F. Reid 1971: 46; 18-9).

According to his biographer, the change in Hardie's argument that is decisive for re-orienting his political action, is a new explanation of poverty. Indeed, at the end of 1886, Hardie has not relinquished the idea that the chief cause of poverty is drinking (see the quotation in F. Reid 1971: 33). By contrast he writes in the *Miner* of May 1887: 'Suppose the money now spent on drink to be divided among the working men of Great Britain ... it would not remove poverty among our midst', which is followed by a clear advocacy of socialism: 'The remedy is a simple one... Get rid of the idea that the capitalist is an indispensable adjunct of the industrial system and the problem is solved' (ibidem: 41-2).

Hardie, however, does not endorse the same model of labour action as Mann conceives a few years' later, while reflecting on dockers' unionism and with reference to his experience as a skilled engineer (see above 5-2). As it will be seen shortly, Hardie does not share Mann's definitions of class and socialism, and rejects a

conception of work conflict as antagonistic. Furthermore, his strategy for socialism is prevalently political, namely centred on the self-organisation of labour at the level of the political system. Hardie proposes new tasks for the state which require an independent representation for the labour movement within the political system. Legislation is proposed to reduce the working hours for the miners, to provide them with national insurance and to establish a machinery of state arbitration in wage disputes (ibidem: 42; see also F. Reid 1978: 93).

New Liberal intellectuals, too, are advocating a growing state 'interference', which is also based on an analysis of poverty which looks for a socio-economic, and not exclusively moral, explanation (Clarke 1983). However, they would not agree with Hardie's proposal, contained in his 1887 Programme of the New Labour Party, for a nationalisation of 'railways, minerals and mines' (F. Reid 1971: 195). According to F. Reid, it is this reference to nationalisation that marks off Hardie from the Liberals. It is also a reference to a class identity which establishes Hardie's distance from the Liberal Party, ready to co-operate with them, but - unlike the Webbs - on the basis of an autonomous organisation. Hardie links political independence to the assertion of the cultural autonomy of labour which can also be noticed in Mann (see above 5-2). 'A working man in Parliament ... should go to the House of Commons with his work-a-day clothes', his speeches have to be in 'the same language and in the same manner' as he speaks in his constituency (F. Reid 1971: 45). In the *Labour Leader*, few years later, Hardie defends the right of popular strata to have access to a park in Manchester which respectable middle strata want to be forbidden, while local

Socialists are organising mobilisations on the issue (F. Reid 1983: 24-8). Hardie's reference is to what Hobsbawm defines as "working-class culture", in the process of being formed during those years in Britain (1984: 176-193). Working-class culture maintains within itself a recognisable pole of respectability, towards which Hardie is strongly oriented (see also Mendilow 1986: 199; see also Hoggart 1958: 78-80). In the same article in which he makes his first statement against the 'capitalist', whose 'day is nearly past', he also writes: 'We do not complain of the drunkard being poor - he has a right to be poor and to suffer all the pangs which poverty brings. What we complain of is that the honest, industrious, sober toiler is kept from year's end to year's end with only one step between him and pauperism' (F. Reid 1978: 97 and 194).

However, such cultural distinction from the pole of roughness (see for instance McKibbin 1994: 101-138), no longer hinders the possibility of integrating the action of both the skilled and the unskilled, the chapel-goer and the drinker. The miners have already brought about such an integration, in their own experience of unionism, both in the NMU and in the MFGB, which is rising in these years. For them to contribute to structuring a new model of conflict, it is necessary to perform the transition, in the case of Durham miners, from a prevalently local to a national identity as the basis for their action; and, for the MFGB, to move from a merely sectional identity, based on the peculiarity of mining work,²⁰ to a class identity (see above 4-3). According to F. Reid, it is Mann who convinces Hardie of the necessity to see the issue of the eight-

²⁰ 'the opinion that ours is an exacting and worrying work' (quoted in Beynon and Austrin 1994: 101).

hour day as constructed on the basis of an identity, and from the perspective of an action, which might be shared by all manual workers (F. Reid 1971: 44).

Hardie's subsequent political career witnesses that his action is now related to the labour movement as a whole. He separates from the Scottish miners and, in 1892, other workers and popular strata elect him in West Ham (see also Hobsbawm 1974: ii). But Hardie's notion of labour is different from the notion of class that has been attributed to Mann's reflection and action. Whereas Mann clearly looks to the industrial worker and to his possible action for the control over the rationalisation of work, Hardie refers to the popular strata as a whole, becoming indeed the 'Member for the Unemployed'. Whilst Mann centres his strategy on the self-organisation of workers on the terrain of civil society, Hardie gives a very important place to the Trade Unions, but only insofar as they are ready to employ their strength in the political system. Mann stresses the issue of workers' control in the most modern *loci* of industry. But both the miners of West Scotland and the unemployed have other priorities. For the former, conflict at the level of civil society means only the accumulation of further defeats, unless some measure that might strengthen their position is taken at the political level. For the unemployed, social conflict is impossible since they are not inserted in work relations. The only course of action available to them is to put - peaceful or violent - pressure on the political system, local and national. Both those miners who are weak in civil society and the socially-excluded unemployed are more interested in conquering political power to introduce legislation aimed at improving their condition (see Mendilow 1986: 201).

As he writes in later decades, for Hardie "the direct participation of the state in the national economy as a large-scale employer ... would compel the captains of industry to improve working conditions or fail under the pressure of the competition with the state, and at the same time to educate all to the value of work and of fair and just relations" (Mendilow 1986: 224). At the time of socialism, "in Hardie's words, the managers, the engineers and the rest would carry on as before, 'just as well and profitably employed by society as they now are by the private capitalists' " (ibidem: 225). In the early 1890s Hardie clamorously sets the issue of unemployment at the centre of parliamentary debate (see F. Reid 1978: 160). As a measure for the unemployed he disagrees with "out-of-work pay ... because to pay money for doing nothing would demoralise them" (ibidem: 165). At this time, his proposals for tackling unemployment are unable to conceive of an increased role for the state, either as formulated by New Liberal intellectuals with their "proposal for government to create jobs and so stimulate consumption" (ibidem: 166), or as the full nationalisation of the economy contained in the SDF programme for the 'organisation of labour' (ibidem: 157). Hardie's major proposal for fighting unemployment is the institution of self-sufficient farm colonies, which is attacked by the SDF on the basis of the argument that the unemployed are to be regarded "as citizens of one commonweal with the workers, having the same right to work and to sustenance from the processes of social production" (ibidem: 148).

A logic of interests is articulated in this development of Hardie's argument in relation

to unemployment, as in similar proposals made by Tom Mann (see above 5-2). To remove the unemployed from the labour market would in fact increase the possibilities for labour to control its own supply (F. Reid 1978: 167). Hardie and Mann also share the idea of a popular movement which is led by organised labour, as the latter comprise strata whose common morality is based on a positive attitude towards work; morality to be associated with the combined influence on Hardie of his puritan upbringing and Carlyle (see *ibidem*: 168). In Hardie's discourse the argument is also put forward that in 'the unemployed colonies ... life would be sweeter, purer and easier', in contrast to the 'miseries of a great industrial centre' (*ibidem*: 166-7). Reid discerns in Hardie a deep-seated nostalgia for a rural past, where the independent Scottish collier could enjoy equitable and peaceful relationships with his master, before the intrusion of both hordes of migrants and capitalist trusts; the miner who mourns for an impossible control of labour supply to be established through apprenticeship restrictions (*ibidem*: 167; 29-33). Consequently, Hardie's discourse is less progressive than either that of Mann or the Webbs.²¹ Hardie recalls the line stemming from Carlyle-Ruskin-Morris when pronouncing his "denunciation of machinery and ... glorification of the beauties of nature" (Mendilow 1986: 217). He maintains a reference to progress, which is activated by "the spiritual element in man ... directing him to fulfil himself through extending his intellectual horizons and shaping his environment to suit his growing needs" (*ibidem*: 211). But this reference is opposed to "the rapid material progress [that] brings with it the domination of the

²¹ For instance, "in Hardie's rhetoric, the British Mayday becomes less an international propagandist strike for common labour conditions, and more a symbolic celebration of the rural revival that socialism would bring..." (cf. F. Reid 1978: 152-3).

satanic element in man" and to the "artificial environment in the form of industrial cities" (ibidem: 209 and 217).

In political terms, the open character of the British political system would allow Socialists not to make recourse to violence in order to conquer political power (see Mendilow 1986: 221). To Hardie, 'socialism offers the one chance left of saving our civilisation from being destroyed by wealth and poverty'. Writing in 1904, he imagines 'one reform after another being won until in the end Socialism itself causes no more excitement than did the extinction of landlordism in Ireland one year ago' (quoted in ibidem: 221 and in Hobsbawm 1974: 66). In terms of collective action within civil society, the reference is not, as in Mann, to class struggle as the process which, by tending to the power of industrial workers in the workplaces, aspires to end domination in society as a whole. Since 'capitalism is the product of selfishness', socialism is for Hardie "a movement of the whole nation which transcends the self interest of all classes and sections" (Mendilow 1986: 219-20). As for the old Chartists, it is a struggle of 'the whole community minus only the propertied class who prey upon it' (quoted in Hobsbawm 1974: 65). The nationalised mines are to be controlled by Parliament which will guarantee "fair trade union conditions" for the miners. The citizen-consumer will have in return "a regular supply of coal from an industry freed from the industrial disputes occasioned by the class struggle between miners and great coal companies" (F. Reid 1978: 148). Hence Hardie's *An Indictment of Class War*, published in 1904, where "the new ideology of class war" is considered as "a symptom of the disease which is sought to cure homoeopathically, by arousing

social hostility" (Mendilow 1986: 218).

There is thus in Hardie the prefigurement of a perspective of labourism for the action of workers, which sets as its horizon the institutionalisation of work conflict, even though he maintains the long-term socialist goal of the collective control over the economy (see F. Reid 1978: 98-9). In a labourist perspective, the aims of the movement are industrial democracy in the workplaces, namely the sharing of power between managers and the organised managed; and economic democracy at the national level, where labour and its political representation try both to achieve a redistribution of wealth and to influence the employers' strategies of investments and labour relations (see below 6-3). Organised labour, therefore, does not act as a class in Mann's sense, from the perspective of an antagonistic conflict which sees the possibilities for social reconciliation only after the power of employers and managers in the factories had been abolished. Organised labour acts rather as an interest group. However, on the one hand, the distinctiveness of a nation-wide working-class culture marks its autonomy. On the other hand, it can claim that its particular gains are to be seen "as bearers of ideas of social justice" (Clarke 1983: 16). This statement is credible because labour action maintains, like in Mann's model of conflict, a reference to a perspective of progress, re-interpreted as the advancement of equality especially when labourism represents the interests of disadvantaged strata like the unskilled and the unemployed.

4 - Towards political integration

The foundation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 is a stepping-stone in the process of constituting the political representation of the popular movement. In 1892 Keir Hardie is the only MP, among those elected as the expression of working people, who is committed to this aim (Hinton 1983: 58). At its birth, the ILP integrates Socialist groups which have emerged in various urban centres of the North such as Newcastle, Manchester and Salford, and a Scottish Labour Party which unites "most Scottish Socialists with Irish nationalists, land reformers and advanced Radicals" (ibidem: 54 and 57). The foundation of the ILP however receives a decisive boost from the impetuous development of the popular movement in Yorkshire from the late 1880s and especially in the early 1890s. Indeed the first ILP conference shows "an overwhelming preponderance of strength in the North of England", with 102 branches out of 305 being in Yorkshire in 1895 (E.P. Thompson 1967: 277 and note 3).

E.P. Thompson highlights the skillfulness of Leeds young Socialist activists who were able, in the years around 1890, to promote and sustain a wave of mobilisations of generally unskilled workers in the county, initially in Leeds and then in the woollen district. The small branch of the Socialist League started its agitation with various trades of the area, such as miners and engineers, on the issue of the eight-hour day. Progressively disinterested in the internal wrangles of their London-based society, Leeds Socialists established contacts with the group associated with Keir

Hardie's *Miner* during the mobilisations, and defined "as their main objectives the conversion of the unions and propaganda for an independent party of labour" (E.P. Thompson 1967: 293-4). It was in 1889 that Socialists were able, for the first time, to challenge the position held within the Leeds Trades Council by skilled workers who were politically oriented towards the Liberals. Thanks also to the resources provided by Socialists, trades from various sectors such as building and engineering, transport and the textile industry were able to organise in new unions which, because of the hostility from the Trades Council, "grouped in a new body called the Yorkshire Labour Council". As Thompson comments, these Socialists found themselves, because of the upsurge of new unionism in Yorkshire, transformed from being members of a small group to the position of "leaders and advisers to the unskilled of half a populous county". Having set up a Yorkshire Socialist Federation together with Bradford, they regarded the eight-hour day 'as the first step towards the abolition of national and industrial war, the overthrow of race hatred and the ultimate emancipation of Labour' (ibidem: 295-8).

On the occasion of the lock-out in the Leeds gas industry and the ensuing violent confrontation, in 1890 some Yorkshire skilled unionists broke off with the Liberal Party which was in control, with a Radical as chairman, of the Gas Sub-Committee of the municipal council (E.P. Thompson 1967: 299-300). The formation of the ILP is however accelerated by the wave of mobilisations in the years 1890-93 in the West Riding woollen district. Not accidentally, it is in Bradford that its foundation conference is held. In the early 1893 the Bradford Trades Council works in close

alliance with the ILP, having more than tripled its membership if compared with mid-1889, when in political terms it was also oriented towards the Liberal Party (E.P. Thompson 1967: 305). "The West Riding woollen district was, in the 1880s, a distinctive community" whose traditions, as defined by Thompson, were "vigorous". During the previous thirty years, textile workers had built a network of "independent or semi-independent" institutions, such as "co-operatives, trade unions, friendly societies, various forms of chapel or educational or economic self-help". Notwithstanding, unionism was weak and in decline, as reflected by the low levels of unionisation and the fact that the only Trades Council was in Bradford (see *ibidem*: 279-81; 285, note 2).

In Thompson's reconstruction, the four-month strike at one big mill in Bradford between 1890 and 1891 means, first of all, the possibility of integrating the action of skilled and unskilled workers. The strike is initiated by "the better-paid workers", but "several thousands unskilled women and girls" also "came out", either "in sympathy" with the strikers or "forced out" in retaliation. With the aim of obstructing this mobilisation, (Liberal) local political power and the chief constable make common cause with the (Tory) employer. This circumstance fosters the development of a community identity by the workers during their protest - thus overcoming the sectionalism of craft unionism - against 'the whole of the monied class of Bradford'. This process in turn creates a fertile ground for the agitation of the Socialists and allows them to gain a position of leadership in the mobilisation (cf. Hinton 1983: 57). After also having supported other trades in the area, the young Socialists are able to

gain access to the woollen district, traditionally impermeable to 'alien agitators'. They utilise the demand for the legal eight-hour day as an issue able to cut across the "complexity and subdivisions" of the textile industry, thus integrating the action of all workers, from the mainly women and juvenile workers in the factories to "the sub-contracting and sweatshops in the Leeds tailoring industry" (E.P. Thompson 1967: 306-7; 280 and 286). Socialists are also drawing on workers' memories of past mobilisations for the reduction of working time, which had been led by Radical Tories and had gained a statutory shortening of the working week in 1874 (ibidem: 280-1). The Socialists can then appropriate the issue of shorter working hours which they insert into the perspective of constructing an autonomous movement and achieving political independence from the traditional parties. For the fulfilment of these aims an important part is played, according to Thompson, by a newly-created independent press organ, essential for articulating an autonomous viewpoint of the workers, since in its columns "bad masters were exposed, grievances aired, successes advertised" (ibidem: 306).

In Thompson's reconstruction, it is the defeat suffered in the strike which, by making impossible self-organisation within civil society, facilitates the channelling into political forms of the autonomous action sustained by community identity (E.P. Thompson 1967: 285-6). In 1891 a Bradford Labour Union is founded under the aegis of the Independent Labour Party and similar experiences multiply. It is a concomitant process to the mushrooming of Trades Councils all over the woollen district, which culminates in the 1893 formation of the Yorkshire Federation of Trades Councils, the

"first county federation" of the country, where Socialists and new unionists predominate (ibidem: 302 and 309-10).

The exceptional development during the early 1890s of the popular movement in Yorkshire thus finds as its ground for expansion the urban aspect of the life of working people rather than the workplace. Together with these straightforwardly political bodies, labour clubs proliferate. In Bradford alone "23 clubs with about 3,000 members are recorded ... by the end of 1892 - which provided entertainment, education and socialist propaganda for many thousands of workers" (Hinton 1983: 57). The development of working-class clubs during this time is not exclusive to the West Riding of Yorkshire, as was remarked when discussing the experience of miners in county Durham (see above 4-3). In general terms, it is a process which consists both in the emergence of new institutions, but also in the wresting away from middle-class patronage of pre-existing clubs for working people (cf. Price 1986: 93).

Unable to structure work conflict against social opponents for the control of the productive process, the popular movement in Yorkshire targets as opponents of its action the political elite which is overwhelmingly influential on the life of urban centres, controlling both the workings of local institutions and electoral contests for parliament. The community identity articulated by popular action in Yorkshire makes reference to the popular strata as a whole, overcoming the internal differentiation of income and cultural orientation. The discourse of the Socialists thus stresses the necessity for independent representation at elections, to be based on issues which refer to the interests of the popular strata, such as measures "on unemployment and

against the half-time system"; for "fair contracts" to be established by local authorities when dealing as employers, and on many urban issues (*ibidem*: 286). Initially, the ILP succeeds in obtaining representation in local authority bodies, taking advantage of the electoral system of proportional representation (E.P. Thompson 1967: 309-11). In the whole of the woollen district, the perspective of independent representation for the labour movement is strengthened, and with it the possibility of adding a third force to the local political system (*ibidem*: 279; see also Reynolds and Laybourn 1975).²²

Born as a national organisation committed to 'the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange', the ILP is confronted with the problem of winning the consent both of the organised labour movement and of the unorganised popular strata (see S. Yeo 1977: 12). Its presence in geographical terms is limited, given the fragmentation of Socialist groups and the persistent workers' loyalty to the Liberal Party, whose influence preponderates within the Trade Union Congress. In the meantime the new unions of gasworkers and railwaymen have joined the TUC, in a general context of growth of unionisation, especially among engineers and miners (see Pelling 1963: 104; Hobsbawm 1974: 151). Though supporting the eight-hour

²² The programme of the Bradford Labour Union "was largely a list of radical-democratic demands" (E.P. Thompson 1967: 308) and labour candidates alternate a language of Radicalism or outspoken Socialism (for examples see *ibidem*: 311-3). The discourse of the popular movement in Yorkshire is influenced, on the one hand, by the ethical appeal of Morris' romanticism and, on the other, by the Nonconformist roots of workers' communities, which had already nurtured the discourse of the popular movement in Yorkshire during the early 19th century. Indeed, Socialists are making reference to a tradition of workers' independence remounting to Chartism, while blaming Cobden and Bright for its decline (see *ibidem*: 288-91).

day, miners and cotton workers are uninterested in the further Socialist claim for the promotion by the TUC of an independent representation for the labour movement (see also 5-2 and 4-3 above), whereas Socialists are also influential in some traditional trade unions, such as boot-and-shoes, printing and especially engineering (see Pelling 1963: 115).

The debate within the ILP centres around the strategy to be pursued for integrating the political representation of the popular movement. Blatchford and Hardie share the premise about the independent character of the future political body. The point of dissension consists in the position to be adopted in relation to the non-Socialist unions, while both agree on the unification with the other two other Socialist bodies - the SDF and the Fabian society.²³ Blatchford is a figure of national prominence within the popular movement. His newspaper, the *Clarion*, is a commercial success, because it includes, "besides political comment, columns on sport and features for amusement rather than instruction" (see F. Reid 1983: 30-1 and Hobsbawm 1974: 143 and 123). Around the paper, a web of activities for recreation, community solidarity and conventional politics are organised; a characteristic which is also shared by the ILP and SDF branches, and other local societies (S. Yeo 1977: 37-9). In political terms, the Clarionettes are a force pushing for the integration among Socialist groups (ibidem: 28 and 36). The latter are asked to abandon their doctrinal rigidities in the name of the solidarity which develops among popular strata along with the growth of the popular movement. Blatchford successfully pursues this

²³ "At its peak in 1895 the ILP had perhaps 35,000 members... The SDF claimed about 10,500 at the

strategy in Manchester, where all Socialists join the ILP and Socialism gains a wide diffusion (Hinton 1983: 57; S. Yeo 1977: 7).

The emergence of the popular movement on a urban and political terrain takes an organisational form which sometimes is close to Weber's ideal-type of the sect, defined the latter as a community which "functions as a selection apparatus for separating the qualified from the unqualified" (1978: 1204). This can be seen, for instance, in some SDF branches "for whom membership ...[is] regarded as a privilege to be gained after prior struggle rather than a card sold on the doorstep" (S. Yeo 1977: 13). Another common feature between Socialist groups of this kind and Weber's definition of the sect is the democratic process of decision-making and the wide grass-root participation to the associational activities, as is also witnessed by the anti-authoritarian and anti-bureaucratic attitudes of the Clarion-inspired ILP sections (Weber 1968: 1207-8; S. Yeo 1977: 36).

For the ex-Socialist Leaguer Bruce Glasier, "strategy mattered little so long as the genius of the cause - fellowship - reigned in the hearts of socialists" (Hinton 1983: 62). Socialism is then conceived of as the transposition to the level of the national society of the ethical relations that the popular strata, organised in the movement, have established. According to Blatchford, these ethical relations are to be preserved together with the procedures of direct democracy, since the organised movement represents "a pre-figuring of the society desired" (S. Yeo 1977: 36). On the other

same time, only about a quarter of them dues-paying members" (Hinton 1983: 60).

hand, Blatchford asserts against the Liberals 'the right of the state to control individuals for the benefit of the nation'. Therefore, he advocates the expansion of the state as a large-scale employer, in order to tackle unemployment, as beneficial for the process tending towards socialism, when Jerusalem will be rebuilt. As for Hardie, employment security "would create the conditions" encouraging "the liberation of the god-like aspects of human nature" ((Mendilow 1986: 222 and 224).

Consequently, Blatchford centres his strategy around the self-organisation of the popular movement on the urban and political terrain. He praises popular culture, which is based on the value of manual work (for examples see Mendilow 1986: 212 and 209). Notwithstanding, Blatchford opposes both workers' control and the idea of centring the strategy for Socialism around self-organisation and conflict at the level of civil society (see *ibidem*: 225). He points at Carlyle's Hero who abstracts himself from his "material surroundings", as a pre-condition for refreshing and strengthening his "spiritual powers" (*ibidem*: 212). Frustrated by the slow development of the popular movement, at the turn of the century Blatchford changes his position by making appeal to material interests and to what he defines as 'the class consciousness of the masses' (see *ibidem*: 221). However, Blatchford's persistent strategy of privileging the political level, as the terrain for the unfolding of popular action, reaches deadlock when he sets for the party the goal of preserving the purity of its socialist creed against 'practical politicians' (*ibidem*: 203). At the same time as recognising the openness of the British political system and thus refusing the use of violence, he opposes any tactical device which might increase the possibilities for ILP

representation (ibidem: 221 and 203). In Manchester the party chooses to abstain from voting where no Socialist candidate is standing, which prevents the possibility of electoral agreement with the Liberal Party (Hinton 1983: 61). By the same token, he refuses any move towards co-ordination with the non-Socialist TUC for aims of political representation, as advocated by Hardie.

The party should consist, in Blatchford's words, of 'a small army of devoted and heroic volunteers' who witness to 'the truth, justice and wisdom of socialism' (Mendilow 1986: 203). But the strategy of 'making Socialists' is unable to go beyond the use of education and persuasion in order to achieve a 'change of heart', with Clarion cyclists "wheeling out at week-ends to take the message of socialism to street corners and village greens" (MacKenzies 1977: 235; see Hobsbawm 1974: 143-4). The sterility of this strategy is in fact shown by the decline in the political activities of *Clarion*, which gradually becomes "a recreational society" (S. Yeo 1977: 38). Instead, it is the course envisaged by Hardie that yields some results in terms of the growth of the movement's political institution. With the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900, his line prevails over the alternative options which make themselves heard in the ILP's debate: on the one hand, Blatchford's reduction of the strategy for socialism as a relationship between the sect and the supposedly amorphous masses; on the other, the inclusion of the party into "the broad stream of Liberal progressivism", with its reduction "to the status of a pressure group in a broad coalition of Radical forces". Ramsay MacDonald, who in 1894 has joined the ILP in frustration over the obstruction of working-class

candidates by Liberal caucuses, advocates the latter strategy (F. Reid 1983: 42 and 35-6; S. Yeo 1977: 38; MacKenzie 1977: 218).

Hardie's "vision" is that the ILP "would replace the Liberal Party as the party of workers in Britain". Hardie relates the independence of the party of labour to the autonomy of the popular movement and to its goal of transcending the present social order (F. Reid 1983: 35-6). By the same token, the party needs to adopt, in Hardie's words, a 'broad tolerant catholicity' in order to attract individuals, and for this reason the proposal to include the word 'Socialist' in its name is rejected at the foundation conference (Mendilow 1986: 203).²⁴ The relationship with the trade unions is crucial, as the ILP cannot claim to represent the labour movement unless the unions are committed to Socialism or, at least, abandon their allegiance to the Liberal Party (see Reid 1983: 35). Each year from 1891 to 1894 resolutions are carried at the TUC either to "draw up a scheme for a labour representation fund" or to urge "the unions to support only candidates pledged" to the public control of the economy. The control on the Parliamentary Committee by Liberal and craft unionists, however, prevents any change in the political stance of the TUC (Pelling 1963: 107-9; 114). Those unionists who intend to withstand the influence of Socialists also express a will to autonomy. 'They wanted a house that had been built by someone else', is the comment by one MFGB's leader in 1899 and also Tillet is impatient with the doctrinal controversies among Socialists (see Pelling 1963: 119; see also Hobsbawm 1974: 96-7).

²⁴ See, in addition, the circular sent out by the ILP National Administrative Council in 1896 quoted in

In the meantime, however, the TUC is changing its political position, also under the impulse of the growing popular movement. During the wave of protest at the end of the 1880s "there is hardly a single occupational group from laundresses and waiters to post office sorters" which has not gone through the experience of self-organisation (Pelling 1963: 101). Gasworkers and railwaymen have succeeded in consolidating their mobilisation. The formers are interested in the policies of municipal authorities that in the North are also their employers, and they side with the Socialists. The latter would also gain from a political representation, which might scrutinise parliamentary activity, heavily impinging on their work. "But such representation, owing to the scattered nature of their membership, could only be secured in association with other trades: there were no obvious railwaymen's constituencies, as there were mining constituencies" (ibidem: 116). Together with the Socialist offensive in the unions of miners and engineers, all these processes point to the emergence of a labour identity which encompasses, on the one hand, the particularity of the single productive branch; and on the other, the exclusive identity of factory artisans that was sustaining, during mid-Victorian decades, the thin TUC activity of pressure on the political system.

This new labour identity does not develop on the terrain of the conflict for the control of work organisation, in the same way as Mann makes appeal to a class identity and to a logic of social movement which aims at workers' power in the factory and in the

S. Yeo 1977: 43.

national society. This emerging labour identity rather expresses a logic of representing interests within decision-making systems at the local and national level. Such claims are negotiable, as they aim towards a different distribution of resources or to change norms, but without challenging either relations of domination in the workplaces or the political constitution of the country. What is changing from the experience of mid-Victorian unionism is, on the one hand, the reference to labour as one nation-wide interest group which includes both skilled and unskilled; and, on the other, the argument that labour interests are not effectively represented by the Liberal Party.

In 1899 Hardie succeeds in carrying a resolution for summoning a conference between Socialist groups and the Trade Unions. The aim is to promote the election of candidates who will operate as a 'distinct labour group in Parliament', with its own whip (Hinton 1983: 71). The conference, held at the beginning of 1900, is attended by "only four of the larger unions ... - the railwaymen, the gasworkers, the engineers and the boot and shoe trades", representing "about a third of the total trade-union membership of nearly one million" (MacKenzie 1977: 275). "Ramsay MacDonald was elected unopposed as secretary, largely because he was prepared to do the work without payment" (Hinton 1983: 71-2; see also MacKenzie 1977: 276). As well as the miners, the cotton spinners refuse to take part in the process of political integration, on the argument that the divided political loyalty of cotton workers between the Conservative and the Liberal parties would entail the disintegration of their action at the level of civil society. For the time being, they can avail themselves

of their own "pressure-group system" based on the United Textile Workers' Association (Pelling 1963: 117).²⁵

The creation of the LRC marks a further step in the creation of an autonomous representation for the popular movement. To Hardie's mind, it means the possibility of starting a process whose final aim is socialism as the nationalisation of economic activity. This process, through constitutional and peaceful means, will bring about the political power of labour, which will redistribute resources especially to tackle poverty and unemployment. For the unions, political representation means the possibility for improving or defending the institutional pre-conditions which facilitate their resistance to employers' control over work relations, and their action both in pursuit of workers' interests and for the control of the processes of change within work organisation.²⁶ The unions that join the LRC now refer to labour as a common interest. Insofar as trade unions aim to integrate the action of both skilled and unskilled into a national interest group, they refer to the same principle of identity which is pre-figured by Tom Mann, however differently they might conceive of class action; whereas Hardie's discourse evokes the principle of totality of the model of conflict in tending towards workers' control of the economy. Neither Hardie nor the trade unions make reference to a model of antagonistic conflict which takes shape in civil society. Trades Councils and Socialists from the West Riding of Yorkshire

²⁵ The new Labour Representation Committee "consists of seven union men, two each from the ILP and the SDF and one Fabian" (MacKenzie 1977: 275).

²⁶ For the threat to unionism of court decisions in the 1890s and the early 1900s, and the subsequent rush to affiliation of trade unions to the LRC, see Pelling 1963: 111-2; 123-4 and 127; Brown 1985: 3-4; Bagwell 1985: 194-6.

instead refer to antagonistic conflict in their mobilisations of the early 1890s. Their action is conducted in the name of a popular community which integrates workers on the basis of an autonomous culture and of common interests that are defined against the unequal distribution of resources and life chances. On the one hand cultural autonomy, whose institutions have been constructed out of the mobilisation, upholds the independence of the popular movement. On the other, however, this conflict, which is structured at an urban and political level, can be reconducted into institutional channels insofar as the political system is open (see below 6-2).

CHAPTER SIX: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE POPULAR MOVEMENT

1 - Class conflict

The narrative of the British labour movement which has been constructed in the last chapter, has tried to retrace the emergence of a new popular movement. It has linked this process to the emergence of a logic of social movement - as one component of labour action - which becomes most prominent in the years between about 1910 and the early 1920s. Such emergence marks a growing autonomy of labour discourse and institutions, and indeed of the action of popular strata as a whole, who are now more inclined to pursue on an independent basis the political representation of their action and interests. This logic of social movement structures a model of antagonistic conflict within civil society which differs in content - along the dimensions of the principles of identity, opposition and totality - from the one structured by artisan action during the first half of the nineteenth century. In both cases, however, a coupling has been posited between, on the one hand, the actuality of a logic of social movement within labour action, which is always combined with a logic of interests; and, on the other, the growing autonomy in the action of popular strata, which allows us to talk, as indeed the activists were doing in the early twentieth century, in terms of

a popular movement (see also Briggs 1971: 1-7). Thus my proposed narrative highlights a double discontinuity in the action of British labour. The first-one is marked by the decline of artisan action during the post-Chartist decades (see chapter 4). The second caesura consists in the emergence of a new logic of antagonistic action in labour mobilisations, for instance in the London dock strike (see above 5-2), which then finds a fuller articulation, as one analytical component of workers' action, during the strikes of the decade 1910-1920 to be considered in this section.

This narrative is far from being shared by various strands of the recent historiography on the British labour movement. Their common argument is the denial of discontinuities in popular action during "the long nineteenth century", in order to emphasise the permanence of Radicalism as the mainstream discourse of popular politics (A. Reid and Biagini 1991; Lawrence 1992). Consequently, continuities are asserted to be prevalent, on the one hand, between Chartism and the "working-class Liberalism" of the mid-Victorian decades (apart from a rational de-radicalisation in political terms); and, on the other, between the latter and the peculiarly British experience of the labour movement, with its "trade union economicism and social democratic reformism" (A. Reid 1978); durability of Radicalism which can be seen, in particular, in the assertion of the independence from the state of the self-organisation of civil society. In Alastair Reid's argument, political change occurs under the pressure of an unexpected occurrence such as the First World War (see Laybourn 1995 for a critique of cognate explanations of political change, based on the argument that war's effect was only to "speed up the process of political change

which had been brought about by the emergence of class politics before 1914"). As A. Reid puts it, "the demands of war production had forced the government to adopt comprehensive controls over markets and even to intervene in the ownership and management of key industries. Thus it was demonstrated that private enterprise was not the only viable form of economic organisation and that some form of collectivism might really be possible on a permanent basis" (1985a: 69-70).

The argument of continuity concerning popular action in Britain is, on the one hand, consistent with an approach to the study of the labour movement which emphasises "the role of institutions such as trade unions, political parties and the state in defining the changing contours of collective action and identity" (Zeitlin 1985a; 1987 and 1989). On the other, in a different version, it highlights a persistent tradition of plebeian Radicalism, which has a strong sense of the autonomy of popular culture ("the defence of the 'pleasures of the people' ") and is translated, in terms of political attitudes, into a "deep-seated popular suspicion of party" (Lawrence 1998: 107; 1991: 69). According to this version of the argument of continuity, political dynamics in the Britain of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are contingent on the ability of each of the three political parties to engage in "active ... manoeuvring" and "strategic calculations", through a discourse which both respects that autonomy and is able to present itself as expression of the popular will in the locality, while casting the political competitors as entangled in the defence of particular interests (Lawrence 1998: 145; 1997: 97). In a similar vein but in a nation-wide perspective, Tanner highlights, as reason for the 1929 electoral victory, Labour's capacity to portray itself

"as a practical, responsible and effective party of reform", thus developing "a general public credibility" (1997a: 122).

One of the polemical targets of this latter strand of the debate are the sociological theories of modernisation, who posit an evolution, within popular politics, from status to interests – to "class" in Weber's terminology - and from the influence of religion to secular politics (Lawrence 1998: 23; see also above 2-1 and 3-1). In this way these authors intend to deny "social determinism" in the explanation of political change, namely the influence of social condition on "voting behaviour", considered as a "statement of political preference" (Lawrence and Taylor 1997: 14-5). To this end they engage in a sustained criticism of the arguments stressing the importance of the Fourth Reform Act of 1918 for political change (Tanner 1997a: 114-6; see also Laybourn 1995). This concern in asserting "the autonomy of the political" can also be seen in the work of Michael Savage (1987), where the distinction is introduced between "formal politics" and "practical politics", the latter being more immediately linked to the materiality of interests and conflicts within civil society (see for instance p. 190).

A discussion of political change in Britain as a whole, which takes into account the dynamics at the national level, in the constituencies and in municipal politics, is beyond the resources which can be deployed in this piece of work. These debates raise wide issues, in terms of electoral sociology and interpretation of historical evidence, which are as stimulating as they find me unable to engage in any systematic

or serious treatment of them. In this piece of work I have tried to employ a notion of social action which emphasises the actual capacity of popular strata to actively construct conflicts. In this perspective, class is not the product of determination but is a kind of action and discourse which is able, increasingly in the wave of protest of the early 1910s, to integrate workers and popular strata (cf. also White 1982), thus providing for the emerging Labour Party one kind of material out of which its leaders could, no less actively, "broker alliances" (see also 3-1 above).

This might allow us to reconsider the debate on continuity in the political experience of the British popular strata, and its inter-relation with the emergence of new discourses among intellectuals and politicians (see also 6-3 below). For instance Lawrence, after having long shown the debt of Fabian thinking to nineteenth-century Radicalism, does not fail to see the switch in Webb's argument where he argues that the 'tyranny that keeps the London tram-slave away from his house for seventeen hours a day' is not 'the tyranny of Priest or King or House of Lords', but 'the tyranny of the Board of Directors, elected by the votes of private shareholders' (quoted in Lawrence 1992: 184). In this light, Webb's discourse appears to be closer to Tom Mann than to any previous or contemporary Radical, for all his distance from Marxian political economy and theory of the state. Class discourse is thus increasingly able to integrate skilled and unskilled workers and, at the same time, marks a growing autonomy in the action of popular strata, which can contribute to explaining the emergence of a new political identity, indeed the emergence of the very idea that workers and popular strata should endow themselves with an

independent institution for political representation (see *ibidem*: 181).

In this perspective, the next two sections will be concerned with the processes of workers' further developing, in the decades between about 1900 and 1920, both the autonomous discourse and the institutions which have emerged in the previous two decades. This section follows the actual development of a class discourse and action when it manifests itself in the protest waves of South Wales coal-miners in 1910-11 and Clydeside engineers in 1915-6. Both series of strikes are not taken as specimens of a wider set of similar events, but as those moments in which labour action reaches the highest levels both of autonomy in relation to its opponents, and of independence from the political component of the popular movement. Both the mining unofficial unionists in South Wales and the leaders of Clydeside engineers speak and act in the name of class, thus marking a discontinuity with the miners' and engineers' discourse of the last decades of the previous century (see 4-3 and 4-2). South Wales miners now make reference to all workers and intend to pursue their interests as part of a common struggle with the workers of the other productive branches, whilst the engineers of the Clyde Workers' Committee try to build up workshop committees which would represent all grades of workers in each factory. Both (with exceptions among Clydeside engineers) claim the absolute control of their own workplaces as the ultimate goal of their action. This claim is extended to the whole national society at least, for which they advocate a future of total reconstruction, with economic and political decisions to be taken by the institutions that the workers have built up in the conflict against the owners and the management. In other terms, they aim to transcend

the present order of society, through a struggle which immanently develops from the conflict for the control of work organisation and which then aspires to be extended to the country as a whole. This process is mirrored by the decision-making machinery which is envisaged in the utopia of the new social order - when labour will be emancipated and with it humanity as a whole: a democratic downwards-up process will grant the workers the possibility of influencing, from the workplaces, the decisions concerning investments, distribution of resources and legal norms which will be taken by the national federation of unions or the national committee of shop stewards (see the quotation from one leader of South Wales miners in Egan 1996: 17).

The early two decades of the new century witness the continuation of the process of increasing workers' self-organisation which had begun from the late 1880s, with a notable growth in the membership of both the Miners' Federation and the whole trade union movement (see Hinton 1983: 84 and 98; Holton 1985: 270). In South Wales the miners, in the aftermath of their defeat in the 1898 strike, had been able to create a federation of district unions, which decided to be affiliated to the national Federation (Egan 1996: 20; Burgess 1975: 211). In the early 1890s "there were nine separate 'district' associations in the area" with "union membership ... confined" to the better-paid "Welsh-speaking coal-face workers". The foundation of the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) in 1898 thus meant the entrance of South Wales miners into national unionism and, through it, into the popular movement. It occurred in the context of a growing self-organisation of the miners in the coalfield, as well as

integration of the action of miners from different pits and of heterogeneous skill, geographical origin and also language, given that unionisation was now also extended to the "English migrants recently recruited to the industry from the agricultural counties of the South-West" (Burgess 1975: 210-1). As such, solidarity among South Wales miners was not the mere projection of a common condition, but had to be constructed out of the conflict which was structured against the owners (see Williams 1996: 140).

The increased self-organisation and integration of South Wales miners was accompanied by a parallel process of growing autonomy for mining unionism nationwide, which repeatedly attempted to replace the sliding scale system with a minimum wage to be established through a nation-wide joint-conciliation board. Miners were arguing that work compensation had to be made more dependent on the living needs of the workers than on the vagaries of coal price in international markets, a variable which was out of their control (Burgess 1975: 203-8 and 212-3). The link has already been emphasised between the sliding scale system and a conception of mining unionism which refuted the notion of class struggle as advocated by some of the socialists (cf. above 4-3 and 5-3). In South Wales, this traditional mining unionism was identified with the patriarchal figure of William Abraham ('Mabon'), who from 1885 was elected as MP for the Rhondda and, like the mining unionists elsewhere in the country, sat among the Liberals (Morgan 1974: 163; Fagge 1997: 196; Shepherd 1992: 119).

In the late nineteenth century the Liberal Party was powerfully entrenched in Wales, as the Nonconformist middle classes had been exploiting the electoral reforms at the national and local level, in order to emerge as competitors for political influence. They were asserting Welsh national identity by claiming Home Rule and the disestablishment of the Anglican church. Both strands of their discourse found the Tories as opponent, who on the contrary constructed their political identity as representatives of the local gentry as well as harbingers of the kingdom's unity and its traditional (English) institutions (Morgan 1974: 159-62). Morgan details the process of Welsh Liberalism by which it was unable to adapt its discourse to the growth of the popular movement and the process of class polarisation in the communities of South Wales which accelerates during the war years. Welsh Liberals are indifferent to the change in the policies of the Liberal administration in 1909, and then in the immediate post-war years, when a more active role is attributed to the state in order to address some of the economic and social issues that the popular movement raises, with the miners now in the forefront (*ibidem*: 163-4; 169-70; Thane 1984: 896).¹ Welsh Liberalism continues to speak its mid-Victorian idiom of religious equality, national autonomy and defence of tenant farmers, but in this way it slowly but progressively loses its cultural and political hold on South Wales communities. In 1918 the Liberal Party still wins 21 out of 26 Welsh seats. However, "the social and economic programmes" of Welsh Liberalism continue to consist of "the severest retrenchment and a dogged anti-socialism" (Morgan 1974: 164-5). The erosion of

¹ See also Pelling 1968: 9-11 for the change in the policies of the Liberal administrations towards more state intervention.

Liberal support begins "with a succession of crucial by-elections in 1919-22" and "was confirmed in the general elections that followed each other in November 1922, December 1923 and October 1924" (ibidem: 175-6). After the MFGB members had balloted for affiliation to the new Labour Party in 1908, South Wales becomes by 1924, like all other mining constituencies, one of Labour's "regional heartlands", which provides a safety-belt for the Party in the most troublesome moments during the process of its consolidation. From then on, Welsh Liberalism remains increasingly confined to rural areas (Egan 1996: 21; Morgan 1974: 177; Williams 1996: 140; Howell 1996: 40).

Historians of a different theoretical orientation dispute the relative importance of the wave of strikes in 1910-1913 in these dynamics of change (see Morgan 1974: 171). I have chosen to discuss it because it is during these struggles in South Wales that the logic of social movement is most clearly expressed in the action of miners. An Unofficial Reform Committee (URC) of the SWMF leads the strikes. As regards the institutional change within mining unionism, the consequences of the action led by the URC are negligible, as Morgan argues when he stresses that by 1914 the leaders of the rank-and-file agitation have been reabsorbed into the channels of official unionism (ibidem). However, the change of outlook that South Wales miners display in the Tonypany riot of 1910, is striking when compared with the previous wave of protest twelve years earlier, as the local Tory press notes (see Williams 1996: 123). The young leaders of the URC have themselves grown up in a changing context. The religious revival in Wales during 1904-5 and new theological arguments stressing

"the social duties of Christianity" influence the future leaders of the popular movement, who "had often come to their socialism ... from the more free-thinking varieties of religious nonconformity" (Morgan 1974: 165-6; Egan 1996: 21). There is an increasing traffic between Wales and the rest of Britain in the Edwardian decade, with "the South Wales valleys" becoming more "cosmopolitan" as mining production continues to expand. On the other hand, the SWMF has offered scholarships to some bright young miners for attending "Ruskin College, the working class institution in Oxford" (Egan 1996: 18). The future mining leaders come to be exposed to theories from abroad which are advocating class antagonism and political radicalism, as well as refusing both the institutional machinery of industrial relations and parliamentary representation as the means to social change and political power. The leadership of 'Mabon' was already under challenge in the late 1890s, while the Socialism of the ILP "was making headway in south Wales" (Williams 1996: 124; Morgan 1974: 171). But the confrontation which occurs between the Cambrian Combine and the miners in 1910-1 proves irresistible for Abraham, who in 1911 is "eclipsed on the S.W.M.F. executive" (Morgan 1974: *ibidem*). "If Mabon's ostensible motto had been 'half a loaf is better than none' ", one of the unofficial leaders of the miners can now retort: 'we are demanding the bakehouse' (Williams 1996: 125).

The young generation of leaders unequivocally attaches to miners' collective action and to the events of protest that it causes, a meaning of class conflict. South Wales miners are united beyond the differences of skill, which already was a characteristic of the (geographically restricted) mining unionism at the time of its mid-Victorian

origin (see above 4-3). From the late 1880s miners see their action as integrating all British coalfields, in order to defend or improve the conditions of the coal workers as a national interest group. As it was seen above (ibidem), this was the experience of the MFGB at its emergence. In the context of a further quantitative leap in mining unionism, the South Wales URC adds a further meaning to miners' action. In their 1912 pamphlet, *The Miners' Next Step*, they address the whole of British workers on the basis of a class identity. They do not see the workers as one, albeit numerically strong, interest group, but as *primarily* engaged in a conflict which they represent as central to the life of the country and, moreover, susceptible of acquiring world-historical significance. That this conflict is seen as antagonistic, is linked to the perspective of an overthrow of relations of domination in the mines and the replacement of that order with the workers' absolute control over work organisation. This argument is also associated to a claim for workers' power in the country as a whole. In this way they are structuring the model of conflict which was prefigured by Tom Mann at the end of the 1880s, in a premature context of weak self-organisation of the unskilled and high self-confidence of craft unionism (see above 5-2). In further affinity with Mann, they also assert the leadership of the workers organised within civil society over the political component of the popular movement.

The nation-wide wave of protest of the early 1910s involves not only miners, but also builders, railwaymen and many other categories of workers (see Hinton 1983: 86-9; Pelling 1963: 136). Among railwaymen, builders and transport workers in Liverpool and Dublin, leading components of these mobilisations put forward a discourse, akin

to that of the South Wales miners, of antagonistic class conflict and critique of those institutions of industrial relations that have been created by official unionism (Pribicevic 1959: 4-5; Price 1986: 172, note 26; Hinton 1983: 87; Pelling 1963: 138 and 140). The influence of doctrines such as French syndicalism and U.S. industrial unionism over the action of British antagonistic workers may be overstressed (see the discussion in Holton 1985: 266-7). The 1908 secession of the London Labour College from the Ruskin institution does in fact mark the growing autonomy of labour discourse in Britain and brings to bear a direct formative influence on the new generation of leaders at the head of the labour unrest of 1910-4 (see Egan 1996: 18-9 and Pelling 1963: 140). The discourse of self-government by the URC, however, is an extension of the miners' autonomy in the workplace and, as such, is to a large extent rooted in their own experience of work solidarity and collective action. A miner allows us a glimpse at the degree of control that the workers have acquired in the organisation of the pits (quoted in Egan 1996: 25):

'The industry is free for any man to enter, there being no real apprenticeship. ... The miner is only a little supervised to see that he is observing the conditions of safety and that he stacks coal properly. On the whole the miner is a greater master of his work than any other worker. ... As to working hours ... as soon as they get finished they can go off.'

The unionism of the South Wales miners is also rooted in a tradition of local autonomy. 'It was the pit lodge which was the basis and the powerhouse of the SWMF, rather than its district or central organisation. ... In the early phases of the development of the coalfield ... the lodge developed as the main force in bargaining

with the owners over" price lists, rates of wage, hours of work, working conditions and allowances. "The coming of the SWMF and the conciliation machinery with the Coalowners' Association did little to change this ..." (Egan 1996: 26). Collective bargaining provides the normative framework, but in its shadow informal work customs on work pace, compensation and other features of work performance are being established and defended. Onto such a tradition the new generation of miners graft the discourse of class conflict, whose ultimate goal is 'real democracy in real life, making for real manhood and womanhood' (quoted in *ibidem*: 24). The utopia of a society freed from dominators is seen as the furthest horizon for an action which develops immanently from the autonomy at the level of the workplace (*ibidem*: 28). Hence the end-state image of a society which is self-managed by manual producers gives the highest possible prominence to down-top mechanisms of decision-making and control. The authors of *The Miners' Next Step* are "at least unsympathetic and at times hostile, to the state collectivism of the political wing of the movement" (*ibidem*: 24). It is with reference to such rootedness in widespread miners' attitudes that one of the URC leaders intends to legitimise their leadership over workers' action in South Wales: there is the horror of bureaucracy and uniformity commingled with the desire to govern as much as possible the conditions under which one has to live...' (*ibidem*: 26-7).

Similar objections to conceptions of the utopia as based on an extension of state powers, can be found among socialist skilled engineers (see Hinton 1973: 45-7). During the early years of the war, they are for a brief time at the head of the wave of

mobilisations in the Clydeside metal industry. To the extent that South Wales miners can see their antagonistic struggle and the utopia of a labour-dominated society as a projection of their autonomy at work, a similar development may be expected in the discourse and action of skilled metal workers, such as the shipyard workers and the engineers, whose position in the organisation of work was exalted, since mid-Victorian years, by the cruciality of their tasks and the craft involved in the performance of them (see above 4-2; Hinton 1973: 96-7; Hobsbawm 1984: 263). In the mid-1910s, some engineers see the conflict for the control of work organisation as tending towards the independent mastery of the factories, workshops and farms, upon which people's bread and liberties depend' (quoted in Pribicevic 1959: 129). Like the miners of the South Wales URC, they see a nexus between their particular struggles and a more general class conflict, and, on this basis, consider as inadequate the limited horizon of the traditional engineers' unionism (see above 4-2). As in the discourse of the miners, the antagonistic engineers are on the one hand linking 'the goal of ... freedom' with the claim that the worker 'must own and control industry'. On the other hand, they assert that 'the industrial organizations of the workers will not only be the force necessary to overthrow capitalism, they will be the foundation of the workers' republic' (quoted in *ibidem*: 73-4 and 130).

In the late years of the war and the immediate post-war years important struggles develop in Russia, Germany and Italy where workers claim power in their own workplaces and, from there, in society as a whole. Everywhere "metal and machine workers" are "in the vanguard" of these mobilisations. Everywhere, in those years, the

more skilled workers "provided the overwhelming bulk of the leadership in the struggles to control production, ... because they tended to be the most literate, organizationally experienced, politically active, and administratively and technically competent among the working class as a whole - attributes which became even more important as the movements developed beyond the workshop and wherever actual control of production was attempted" (Sirianni 1980: 34 and 31; see also Hobsbawm 1968: 360).

In Britain, "the pattern of industrial relations" in the engineering industry during the second half the nineteenth century had the issues of overtime, piece-rate systems of compensation and the manning of jobs, as the central ones in negotiation and disputes (see above 4-2). The action of craft engineers, mainly fitters and turners, was aimed at defending the control of work organisation that they had been able to establish after the introduction of new machines in the years 1830-1850. The identity of the trade, its peculiar prominence within work organisation, was asserted in the action of skilled engineers, if necessary in competition with the unskilled who resented it as a privilege. Fitters and turners were trying to preserve, through the union, the monopoly on their traditional job territory as a pre-condition for keeping under control the length and pace of their performance. Maintaining the possibility of filling jobs through apprenticed men allowed craft engineers also to keep the level of wages under a certain degree of control (see also Hinton 1973: 93). For symmetrical reasons, employers and management, especially if innovative or under growing pressure from international competition or simply because they were keen on re-asserting their own

prerogatives, were tending to regain control over work organisation. This was a conflict which was located both at district level, where wage-rates were defined, and in the workshops, where the issues concerning work organisation were negotiated or disputed. The national ASE, defeated in the 1852 lock-out, had few powers in controlling the periphery of the organisation. A hiatus in outlook developed between the central London-based level on the one hand, respectable in its thin activity of pressure on the political system and in charge of the administration of benefit funds, and on the other the "craft militancy" of the workshops (see 4-2 above).

The technical and social conditions under which the conflict for the control of work organisation was being structured in the engineering industry, were modified by the emergence of new products and work machines in the sector. New production techniques that were not based on craft work and could thus dispense with its customs, were being applied to the manufacturing of new products destined for emerging mass markets, such as sewing machines and bicycles (Price 1986: 97; Hinton 1973: 112). It was the introduction of new machines from the 1880s which allowed the management to mount a sustained assault on the position of turners and fitters, and also on traditional productions. New machines opened up the technical possibility of replacing craft workers with a new stratum of workers. They were in no need of the turner's and fitter's skill but, at the same time, could not be considered, like the traditional unskilled in the engineering industry, as mere labourers (see Hinton 1973: 159).

The introduction of new technology and the re-structuring of work organisation meant for the employers the opportunity for successfully attempting to rationalise the labour process and, by the same token, for increasing their capacity to control workers' performance. The process of change was however uneven, as some engineers "felt less threatened by the effects of technological change that were most apparent only in a minority of large firms in certain sectors of the industry like armaments manufacture" (Burgess 1975: 52-3).² An example of the set of management initiatives associated with technological change can be seen at one "giant Newcastle-based firm", which in 1890 "employed some 15,000 men in its naval shipyard, ordnance and engine works". There semi-skilled machinists were extensively employed only in the repetitive work which was possible for producing shells and machine guns: they were paid by the piece and "frequent rate cutting prevailed", while attendance was monitored by "an elaborate system of time-keeping". But also "where the nature of the work precluded piece rates ... or where the men were thought to be limiting output to prevent rate cuts, the firm introduced a special class of supervisors, ... [the] 'feed and speed' men, whose sole duty ... was 'to keep moving to the shops in order to see that each machine is being kept at its proper speed and is producing the amount of work which is known to be capable of turning out' " (Zeitlin 1985: 203-4). Besides trying to enforce "tighter workshop discipline", "employers sought to appropriate to themselves and their supervisory staffs a greater

² On the possibilities in certain older sub-sectors, such as textile engineering, for British firms to continue with their traditional strategies, see Zeitlin 1985b: 229. See also Price (1986: 95-9) for a concordant analysis of the actual links, in British industry as a whole, between market structures, firms' competitive strategies and policies of work re-organisation.

share of the planning and direction of production". This however did not mean the extinction of fitters and turners, even though "these developments tended to displace skilled workers from a direct role in production". "A separate toolroom was established where skilled workers designed the jigs and fixtures necessary for repetition production, [and] craftsmen were required in considerable numbers to make and set tools for the less skilled; to repair and maintain machinery, and even to perform production work where the nature of the task or the size of the run made mass production methods impractical or uneconomic" (Zeitlin 1985b: 230; see also Hinton 1973: 64). Thus a crude thesis of de-skilling is unable to capture the complexity of the process. In fact "fitters and turners also acquired new skills such as the need to read more complicated designs and blueprints" (Price 1986: 106). However, a de-composition of the tasks once unified in the figures of the turner and fitter did occur, with the separation between the production shop-floor and the toolroom (see Hinton 1973: 59). Whilst the latter is a potential bulwark of worker autonomy in resisting management initiatives of rationalisation, skill is actually diluted in the former (see Hobsbawm 1984: 263-4 and Pribicevic 1959: 33). From this point of view, the employers' and government offensive on "dilution" during wartime, namely the massive introduction of women and unskilled men in munitions work which ignited the mobilisations, temporarily led on Clydeside by the Workshop Committee in 1915-6, is but an intensification of the conflict for the control of work organisation, in the new context of a possible re-organisation of the labour process which was opened up by technological innovation (see also Zeitlin 1985b: 221-2; for the dynamics prevailing, on the contrary, "in the bulk of engineering industry" see

ibidem: 230).

The response of the ASE to the changes in work organisation could not be a mere rejection of technological progress, given the transformation of union discourse in the second half of the nineteenth century (cf. 4-2 above). Within the ASE, socialist engineers launched, in new unionist fashion, a campaign for making the statutory eight-hour day the policy of the society, thus opening up the possibility for integrating the action of the skilled and the new semi-skilled (see Burgess 1975: 54). The socialists were advocating the transformation of the ASE into an industrial union, both as a pre-condition for attempting to regain collective control over work organisation, and as an institutional change consistent with the discourse of class. As it was seen above (5-2), in 1892 Tom Mann was narrowly beaten for the ASE Presidency on a proposed "policy of 'comprehension' " towards the semi-skilled machinists; a tight result which can be explained, according to Burgess, by the uneven spread of the dynamics of change nation-wide. In the delegate meeting of the same year, however, the 'forward' wing of the ASE won the alteration of the union constitution in order to open the membership also to "electrical engineers, roll turners [and] machinists" (Burgess 1985: 172-4 and 1975: 52-3). In fact the new policy did not progress because of its tacit rejection by district officials and the rank and file in the workshops; a situation which was not altered by the election of the ILP-member and Mann's associate, George Barnes, as ASE President in 1896 (Burgess 1975: 52; Zeitlin 1985b: 231-2). In relation to the machine issue, "the basic ASE contention was that employers were free to introduce improved machines so long as skilled men were

allowed to operate them, at mutually agreed standard wages" (Burgess 1975: 60; see also Burgess 1985: 172-3). This so-called policy of 'following the machine' would allow the engineers to maintain some control over labour supply and work organisation, while reproducing a craft identity. "During 1896-7 there was a mounting number of disputes over the control of machinery" which were fought at a local level (Burgess 1975: 60).

In the meantime, the tendency towards power decentralisation and the growing hiatus between the central officialdom and the local rank and file, was reinforced by the ASE defeat in the 1897-8 lock-out. The ASE leadership identified its credibility both towards the employers and the union periphery with the defence of the Terms of Settlement which had rather ratified its weakness vis-à-vis the employers (Hinton 1973: 81-2). Shortly after the creation of the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF), the employers achieved an emphatic re-assertion of their prerogatives over all the contested features of work relations: from the possibility to hire non-unionists and to agree piecework prices with individual workers, to overtime, to the employment of apprentices and the manning of machines. In addition, the 1898 "Terms of Settlement established a novel dispute procedure which prohibited strikes before a national conference had occurred between the union Executive and the EEF" (Zeitlin 1985b: 224-5 and 227-8). In the attempt to give some consistency to the ASE policy towards the employers' offensive for change (see Burgess 1975: 63-4), Barnes was also cutting the roots by which the rank and file might have contended for some degree of control over work organisation. There followed a dreadful time for the ASE, which

was repeatedly paralysed by the hostility between the different organisational levels³ (see Pribicevic 1959: 31 and Hinton 1973: 83-4) and the diversion of energies into demarcation disputes with the unions of the unskilled and other smaller trades. As a result, the ASE was losing the prestige gained within the labour movement during the mid-Victorian decades (Pribicevic 1959: 29).

The strategy of 'following the machine'; however, was fairly successful, as "ASE members were increasingly able to capture control of the new machinery" (Zeitlin 1985b: 228). But this very success was showing how unprecedentedly problematic the reproduction of a craft identity, as a basis for labour action, had become. Indeed "by 1914 a substantial proportion of the work performed by the craftsmen, at the craft rate, required little of their skill" (Hinton 1973: 61). Unlike the printers, engineers were losing ground on the issue of apprenticeship, the kernel of craft identity since the beginning of the previous century (Zeitlin 1985b; see above 3-3). "Up to 1914 at least apprenticeship remained the chief route of entry into the Society but the quality of apprenticeship was visibly declining" (Hinton 1973: 60; see also Zeitlin 1985b: 206 and 228).

"While the union remained (more or less) an exclusive craft union in its membership

³ "The internal system of checks and balances in the ASE constitution" (Zeitlin 1985b: 232) is described by Pribicevic (1959: 30-1). He emphasises the obsolescence and inefficiency of the engineers' organisation, whereas Zeitlin rather stresses its democratic character (1989a: 53). On the proposal of the South Wales URC for a synthesis between centralisation and internal democracy cf. Egan 1996: 28. See also in general on this issue Hinton 1973: 282 and Zeitlin 1987: 161.

policy, its defence of the standard rate rested increasingly on bluff. As the craftsmen accepted work on the new machines the real skill content of their work declined, and they lost the ability to defend the standard rate by deploying genuine craft power. In any future conflict the skilled engineers, for the first time since the decline of the millright in the early years of the nineteenth century, risked finding themselves susceptible to large scale blacklegging. The vast expansion of engineering production required by the war effort revealed the degree to which the genuine skill content of the craftsmen's work had declined. In a very short space of time the employers were able to import a mass of new workers, men and women, on to jobs previously the preserve of skilled craftsmen. Much of the initial dilution involved very little mechanical innovation" (Hinton 1973: 61-2). In contrast to shipbuilding where dilution was very problematic for the nature and conditions of the work tasks (see A. Reid 1985b: 50), in munitions work "there was an enormous advance in repetition production" and "the pace of technological advance quickened under wartime stimuli". Dilution was further advanced "by the design and installation of 'special classes of machines for munitions work, machines which are characterized by unusual simplicity and strength', and thus suited for female and unskilled labour' (Hinton 1973: 62).

The campaign over dilution on Clydeside is conducted through an alliance between the local management, Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions and some high civil servants who are particularly eager to promote the modernisation of production (see Hinton 1973: 30-1; McLean 1983: 29 and 35). Their aim is to remove the obstacles

that skilled workers have placed in the way of a possible increase in productivity: their 'restrictive practices' and the resistance to dilution. To the customary representation "to public opinion" of skilled workers "as enemies of progress", the charge of being unpatriotic is added during wartime (Zeitlin 1985b: 226; McLean 1983: 13 and Waites 1987: 189). One of the large Glasgow engineering employers, who "was a keen exponent of work-study and American speeding-up techniques labelled 'Taylorism' ... had been urging dilution, and breaking craftsmen's power, long before the war, but he saw the war as a heaven-sent opportunity" (McLean 1983: 12 and 31).⁴

The formation of the Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC) in October 1915 and the action of those munitions workers who follow its lead until the repression of April 1916, introduces some innovation within the discourse of skilled engineers. Under the pressure of managerial initiatives for change and rationalisation, the CWC attempts to develop a kind of action which is not purely entrenched, in relation to the dilution issue, in the craft defence which is entailed by the policy of 'following the machine'. Following the tradition of engineering unionism, they attempt the control of dilution through the workshop committee, namely the organisational level which is closest to the issues of work re-structuring and their peculiarity in each factory (see Hinton 1973: 79-80 and Burgess 1985: 178). The innovation consists in their attempt at

⁴ On the way in which the strategic situation in bargaining or disputing over the issue of dilution is contingently modified by wartime conditions, cf. Hinton 1973: 34-6, 65, 91-2 and 113-4; McLean 32-4, 40-8 and Waites 1987: 201-2.

opening the workshop committees to plant workers irrespective of their skill, as was already being experimented with informally, especially in workshops of thin union density (Burgess 1985: 180). This can be considered as a promising step since, on the basis of achieving some co-ordination between the action of skilled and less skilled workers at the workshop level, the attempt is also possible to re-establish some integrated control of work organisation. In this way the CWC also makes a contribution to the debate among socialist and syndicalist engineers who have been persisting, through the unofficial campaign for amalgamation during the pre-war years, in their demand for transforming the ASE into an industrial union (see Pribicevic 1959: 65-76).

The traditional action in defence of the customs and privileges of the trade may yet be unruly and intractable, as in those instances of protest on Clydeside which are caused by the so-called "craft militants". But, on the one hand, this entails that skilled workers renounce the possibility of integrating the action that they are developing in opposition to the management, with the workers of inferior skill in the factory⁵ and with the other popular strata. On the other hand, the action of the craft militants cannot sustain a perspective of transcending the social order in factories and society as a whole, because they are unable to put forward, within public debate, a credible counter-argument to the employers' self-representation as champions of progress and

⁵ As Hinton argues: "as dilution advanced ... the interdependence of all crafts and grades in production became a matter of daily experience" and "sectional trade unions", in the words of one antagonistic leader from Sheffield in 1919 are 'maintaining distinctions which the social processes are rapidly making artificial' (1973: 290).

national interest against the selfish resistance of the engineers. Hence the ambiguity of the ASE stance on dilution. With the aim of smoothing the process of change in the workplaces, it has been incorporated within the machinery of war management. This bears undoubted benefits in terms of the possibility for engineers to control the normative framework for the policies of change. The ASE representatives aim at vague formulations of these rules in order to allow the rank and file to exploit their ambiguities and obstruct the change or pursue the interests of skilled workers in the process. As McLean comments: "in a sense, the ASE Executive had the worst of both worlds: condemned by the Ministry for dragging its feet over dilution, it was condemned by its militants for encompassing it at all" (Hinton 1973: 50-3; Mc Lean 1983: 35-36).

The CWC indeed develops outside the official structure of the ASE, but this is not its most vital feature. Looking at it in a comparative perspective, it can actually be considered as a source of weakness for the mobilisation led by workshop committees on Clydeside (see Sirianni 1980: 32 and 42-7). The most interesting feature of their experience consists rather in the new arguments developed by the CWC leaders on dilution. It is possible to distinguish two main components among the CWC leaders, which overlap fairly accurately with their respective affiliation to Socialist societies. The majority among the CWC leaders are members of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), a sect⁶ which is inspired by the U.S. experience of industrial unionism. It is a

⁶ "No candidate could be admitted to membership [of the SLP] without passing an entrance examination on the principles of Marxism" (McLean 1983: 103; see also Pribicevic 1959: 17 for a contrast with Mann's Syndicalist League).

small group, exclusively concentrated in Scotland. The SLP is however influential on Clydeside, where his members are recognised as leaders by the workers of some munitions works. The other component is represented by one ILP member, who is the undisputed leader of the Parkhead factory (Hinton 1973: 120-5, McLean 1983: 100-8).

Both components link the organisation of 'the workers upon a class basis', to quote the Committee's Constitution (see Pribicevic 1959: 124), with a new argument on dilution. One of the leaders, a SLP member, argues in December 1915: 'We regard [dilution] as progressive from the point of view that it simplifies the labour process, makes labour more mobile, and tends to increase output. In short it is a step in the direct line of industrial evolution. But - and this is where the present difficulties arise - its progressive character is lost to community unless it is accompanied by a corresponding step in social evolution'; and the ILP paper in January 1916 speaks of the 'dilution of labour ... as the natural development in industrial condition'. The stance of the CWC as a whole can be summarised in the words of the same ILP paper: 'But this scheme of dilution must be carried out under the control of the workers' (quoted in Pribicevic 1959: 114 and in McLean 1983: 52). For the SLP members in the CWC this position is linked to a perspective of antagonistic conflict which aims to transcend the domination of employers and management in the factories. For this reason as well, the leaders have promoted a district-wide co-ordination of workshop committees. As one of them writes: 'The ultimate aim of the Clyde Workers' Committee is to weld these unions into one powerful organisation

that will place the workers in complete control of the industry' (quoted in Hinton 1973: 129). When Lloyd George goes to Glasgow in order to convince the workers that their patriotic duty rests in giving way to dilution, the CWC proposes a joint management of the process of change and the nationalisation of industry (see Pribicevic 1959: 114). The other component which is prevalent at Parkhead settles, on the contrary, for an agreement with the government which guarantees some control of the change process, without mentioning nationalisation (McLean 1983: 71-5; Hinton 1973: 150-1).

Class action is thus compatible *both* with a perspective of antagonism and with a standpoint which allows for a varying degree of institutionalisation of class conflict. With regard to antagonistic action, a comparison with the experience of the South Wales miners allows us to highlight the sectarian obsession with purity of the SLP (cf. also Pribicevic 1959: 21), which can be seen from the stance adopted by the CWC leaders in relation to the institutions of collective bargaining and official unionism. While the South Wales URC is reabsorbed into official unionism, it is yet able, from within, to influence the policy of the SWMF (see for instance Egan 1996: 22). By contrast, one SLP exponent, a leader of the shop stewards' agitation in Sheffield, writes in 1918 of "rejecting the idea of capturing official posts", as "leadership involves compromising with the employers and even 'selling out' workers' interests"; and trade unions are "considered as a 'bulwark' of capitalism which should be destroyed" (Pribicevic 1959: 91 and 15; cf. also Hinton 1973: 281).

The perspective which is advocated instead by the second component falls short of antagonism and of conceiving the transcendence of the social order as a process which develops immanently from the class struggle at the micro-level of the workplace. It sees instead the institutionalisation of class conflict as the furthest horizon for labour action. Thus the Parkhead leader does not believe in workers' absolute control of work organisation: as he writes in 1917, 'I don't think the workers in any particular industry should absolutely own and control the industry as this might enable them to exploit the community' (quoted in McLean 1983: 108). In this case the perspective of building a 'new social order' is either referred to popular strata generally and thus it is entrusted to the political party, which consequently gains prevalence over labour action; or it is abandoned altogether, and the perspective of the labour movement becomes industrial democracy in the factories and economic democracy at the national level (see also Pribicevic 1959: 115).

It is the second component that elaborates the proposal on dilution which is also adopted by the shop stewards in the other factories besides Parkhead, and might attain the class integration between skilled and unskilled. It does realistically (see Hinton 1973: 151) take into account the interests of skilled workers, asking for 'every second dilutee' to 'be an apprentice of three years and to receive the district rate'. There is, however, a clear overcoming of craft action in proposing 'that the income of the new class of labour be fixed, not on sex, previous training, or experience of the workers, but on the amount of work performed, based on the rate presently obtaining for the particular operation ...' (quoted in McLean 1983: 76).

The engineers - both the antagonists and the other component which is oriented towards industrial democracy and the institutionalisation of class conflict - are in a better position than the miners for making reference to the principle of totality in the new model of conflict. As they are under the pressure of innovation and rationalisation, they are best located to formulate a discourse which couples the ethical claim springing out of workers' solidarity in the workplaces, with the progressive argument that sees private ownership of industry and absolute control of management over work organisation as fetters on the further development of the productive forces (see above 5-1). Thanks to the argument about the progressive character of dilution, technological innovation and the rationalisation of the work process are resisted, not because they are threatening the customs and privileges of the trade, but because the social opponent controls them. As the official organ of the CWC writes in its last issue before the unleashing of repression: 'Make capital a national possession, give Labour a share in the control of industry under the supreme direction of the State, and production will go up by leaps and bounds' (quoted in Pribicevic 1959: 117). Such an argument can hardly be conceived of by the South Wales miners, given that "formulating a response to the challenges posed by mechanisation never became central to the strategy of the SMWF", and certainly it does not in the early 1910s (see Williams 1996: 136). The very natural condition of their work activity, the extraction of an exhaustable source of power, does not allow the miners to conceive of a future, for mining work, which is based on an increase in production. Indeed miners are used to employ 'restrictive practices' "when working

in a seam that was becoming exhausted", in order "to extend its working life and their employment" (Egan 1996: 26).

2 - Political reformism

The integration that has been attempted on Clydeside between the action of the skilled and the unskilled in engineering does however prove to be ephemeral (see also Waites 1987: 194-201). First the deportation of the CWC leaders out of the area and then the mobilisations on the issue of conscription⁷ mark the end of the experiment. The process is further sealed by the restoration of the pre-war technical and social conditions with the return to peace economy. "The methods of mass production introduced during the war were largely abandoned. ... Dilutees were either dismissed (as happened with most women workers) or put back on the jobs they had before the war. By the summer of 1919, the suspended rights and rules of the trade unions were fully restored without much opposition from the employers" (Pribicevic 1959: 37 and note 1).

In the meantime, with the lightening of repression, the leaders of the former Clyde

⁷ "Skilled men were protected from being drafted into the Forces if they were working on munitions. The official and unofficial engineers' agitations between 1916 and 1918 were almost all centred round disputes over the operation of this system, and this was not a fight in which the unskilled men could be expected to have any sympathy with the skilled" (McLean 1983: 109).

Workers' Committee are in the forefront of unofficial initiatives for co-ordinating shop stewards in engineering at the national level. In the debate within the engineers' component of the movement, they maintain a perspective of antagonistic conflict which is linked both to an identity of class and to a perspective of transcending domination: "workers would have complete control and ... the management of particular establishments would be in the hands of workshops and plant committees representative of all grades of workers employed" (Pribicevic 1959: 170). Their experience of workshop bargaining, under the pressure of management rationalisation (see Hobsbawm 1984: 269), puts the engineers in the best condition to conceive of a struggle for power at a national level which develops immanently from their grass-root self-organisation.⁸ As Pribicevic remarks (1959: 174), "the system of workshops and local workers' committee" is "intended to serve both as the organs of class struggle and as the means for controlling industry". For this reason the antagonistic engineers hesitate in contemplating nationalisation as their plan for the utopia. Through the class integration with the unskilled, skilled workers could contend with the management over the control of work organisation. Like the artisans of the first half of the nineteenth century, they can envisage a future where their own technical expertise would allow the workmen to run production (see *ibidem*: 172-3). The strategy of workers attaining control of the economy through nationalisation contains the risk, it is argued against the Fabians, that the domination of private industrialists will merely be replaced by 'the Servile State' (see Hinton 1973: 46-7). In addition, the actual strategy for nationalisation would entail the prevalence, within the labour

⁸ On the increased importance of the engineering shop stewards during wartime see Waites 1987: 206.

movement, of the (either reformist or radical) political party. On the contrary, for the antagonistic shop stewards the leadership of the movement is to be entrusted in "the industrial union based on workshop organisation", given that this is the institution which can be most closely kept under the control of the workers (see Pribicevic 1959: 170).

After the experience of 1915-6 on Clydeside, however, the capacity for antagonistic engineers to represent actual communities of workers in workshops and plants becomes more tenuous. The national co-ordination of class-oriented engineers comes to constitute a component within the labour movement which is increasingly characterised by an option of political radicalism, especially since the victorious example set by the Bolshevik revolution and the emergence of a Communist current within the international labour movement (see Pribicevic 1959: 131-144; Hinton 1973: 318-29). Like for the experience of antagonistic miners, there is an intrinsic limit in actualising a logic of social movement which develops immanently from the workplaces. Insofar as it aims towards the event of transcending, it needs to challenge state sovereignty. However, that can only be done on the basis of an *actual* strategy of *permanent mobilisation*, which can find no rest, as the latter would imply some degree of institutionalisation of class conflict with the risk of defusing antagonism. As it will be seen later, the conditions for the development of such a strategy fade away with the hardening of the economic crisis which particularly hits the miners. In addition, a strategy of continuous mobilisation which intends to challenge the sovereignty of the state needs to stretch beyond the workplaces. The Liverpool

general strike of transport workers in the summer of 1911, under Tom Mann's leadership, is the closest instance of such an attempt during the decade (see White 1991: 179). According to his biographer, Mann's leadership is exclusively concerned with the industrial aims of transport workers (ibidem: 177). However, during the early 1910s, at a time when he is fascinated with the achievements of French syndicalism, Mann pays more attention to the Trades Councils as "a parallel to the French *Bourses du Travail*" when envisaging the future utopia (ibidem: 158 and Pribicevic 1959: 20). He might also have seen the Trades Council as organ of "dual power", as the intermediate stage between the instances of 'direct action' and the decisive event of the 'general strike' (Pribicevic 1959: 19). Indeed, during the mobilisation, "the strike committee began to issue permits for the moving of vital necessities" (see White 1991: 177-9). But the state in Britain, in the last years of the war and in the immediate post-war years, is stronger than in Germany or Italy. Certainly it is not in such a deep crisis as it is in 1917 Russia, and thus attempts of dual power are very difficult to make succeed (see Sirianni 1980: 33-4).

The steering of the antagonistic engineers towards the Communist Party and the primacy of (radical) political activity appears to be the most consequent move after the impasse of a strategy which would develop immanently from the dynamics of conflict at the workplace and concentrate its challenge for power in the loci of industrial production. In this way, however, the action of British workers would lose its independence and become subordinate to the strategy of a political party whose policies are, in turn, heavily conditioned by the renewed imperial aims of a foreign

power (see Pribicevic 1959: 107-8). Thus Communist engineers in Coventry follow in 1941 the U-turn of the Soviet Union and the Third International towards Germany, and inaugurate their production-oriented campaign which reignites the experience of shop stewards (Hinton 1980: 90-92).⁹

In the meantime, the action of the majority of the engineers keeps on reproducing the traditional craft identity and refrains from structuring the principles of identity and totality of the new model of conflict. They do not act in terms of class nor does their discourse criticise the employers in the name of progress. Referring to the experience of engineers' unionism in the subsequent decades, Hobsbawm comments: "its major weapon (leaving aside the production-oriented unionism of the communists in 1941-5) was much the same as in 1918-21: sheer blinkered, dour, stubborn defence of 'the custom of the trade' in the shops" (1984: 270). Consequently, the ASE is uninterested in organising "the most modern sectors of the industry ... such as cycles, cars and electrical engineering", where the less skilled are "disproportionately employed" (Zeitlin 1985b: 234). During the war, skilled workers are able to retain their own spheres of self-determination within production and resist the attack of rationalisation which is however weak, for instance in the Clyde shipyards (see Reid 1985b: 52 and 54 and the episode narrated in McLean 1983: 31). But the engineers and the shipyard workers do not intend to integrate their collective action - *at least the one that they*

⁹ For the process, in post-revolutionary Russia, of the workers' institutions of self-management being supplanted by the party and state-appointed managers, see Sirianni 1980: 68-73 and Pribicevic 1959: 145, note 1.

develop within civil society and singles out the management as their opponent - with the unskilled.

However, as it was anticipated, the identity of trade begins a slow process of decline which is connected to technological development and the change in work organisation that the management succeeds in introducing. As Hobsbawm argues, to the extent that the skilled are working on the same machines as the machinists, the correlation between skill on the one hand, and privilege or high wages, on the other, fades away. Their asserted superiority loses its content: in the subsequent decades "the craftsman's position" can still be successfully protected "by job monopoly secured by trade unions and by workshop control", but "artisans are merely one set of workers among many others who might, given the right set of circumstances - generally the occupation of a strategic bottleneck - establish such strong bargaining positions". This is not an argument about de-skilling, but about the fact that processes of training in newly-created professional jobs within industry do increasingly rarely, as the century unfolds, occur through socialisation within the community of the trade, as is shown by a comparison of the data on the number of apprentices in 1916-1925 and 1966-73 (Hobsbawm 1984: 270-1).¹⁰ The culture of the artisans which had been emerging from at least the early 1800s, was based on manual prowess and the quality of output connected with it. On such a basis, in the second half of the nineteenth century, skilled engineers were also resisting the introduction of piece-work, as it was seen above (see 4-2). But this culture is being undermined by craftsmen themselves

¹⁰ Waites (1976: 37) notes "the infrequency after 1914 of the identification of a separate 'artisan class'

when, especially in times of inflation and reduction of wage differentials with the unskilled, they accept to work on "piece-rated repetition production" (see Burgess 1985: 173; Hinton 1973: 61, note 6; Hobsbawm 1984: 271). In the mid-Victorian decades, the action of skilled workers combined a logic of interest with the defence of a trade identity (see above 4-2). From the 1910s-20s on, the reproduction by skilled workers of an action in exclusive defence of their condition responds, in the context of the decline of artisan culture, to a mere logic of interests and it is on such a basis that their action does not seek an integration with the unskilled.

To sum up, the experience of British skilled engineers bifurcates. The first horn is the majority, rallied in the ASE, who are unwilling to integrate their action within civil society with unskilled workers. The second one is the minority who enter the Communist Party. They are the heirs of those SDF workers who see themselves as "a working-class elite and vanguard,... the thinking, reading, militant workers who put in a great deal of time on the cause, rather than ... the average man"; hence their tendency towards sectarianism (Hobsbawm 1968: 236-7). They are "the toolmakers and the men who built the aircraft of the 1930s and 1940s", men who, "even when engaged on what was in effect semi-skilled work, [were] craftsmen by background and training". In the 1930s they "brought the waters of unionism back into the desert of non-union shops", playing a "crucial ... role in the growth of mass metals unionism" (Hobsbawm 1984: 269-70). But, as Hinton informs us (1980: 101), "there was a long-standing conflict within the Coventry [Communist] Party between skilled

" in the specialist literature.

and less-skilled members", and also during the revival of shop stewards in the early 1940s "the rivalry between the most craftist engineers and those TGWU activists who identified with the interests of the semi-skilled continued to plague the Coventry CP".

At the political level, the option of radicalism never becomes viable for the British labour movement: on the one hand the state is too strong and never allows any doubt to be raised about who is endowed with the monopoly of physical violence. On the other, as it was suggested above, the political system is open enough for a reformist strategy to prevail within the political component of the movement. In comparison with Germany, British Parliament has "the power to decide the formation of the government" in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and the "degree of repression" against the Socialists and labour movement activists in general is lower (see Eisenberg 1989: 415 and 424; cf. also Tanner 1997b: 65).

However, skilled workers, for instance in the shipyards, integrate their action with other popular strata when they take part in mobilisations around urban issues such as the rent strikes on Clydeside in 1915 (see A. Reid 1985b: 56). But it will be seen that the fact that the integration between skilled workers and other popular strata does not occur on the terrain of work relations or during struggles where the opponent is the management, will have consequences for the relationship between social conflict and the popular movement as a whole, conditioning the relative prevalence of the political or civil-society component.

In the post-war decades, the popular movement in South Wales consolidates its presence rallying around the SWMF - the 'Fed', as it was dubbed - during mobilisations but also during times when statistics do not record events of protest. One of his leaders recalls in 1972: 'The Fed was a lot more than a trade union; it was a social institution ... Its functions became a combination of economic, social and political leadership ... It is not surprising, therefore, that this kind of background produced a loyalty to the union so strong...' (quoted in Egan 1996: 31; see also the quotation from a 1927 union publication in Williams 1996: 137). This situation is similar to the experience in County Durham which was analysed above (4-3), but the degree of cultural autonomy of the miners, who from the 1910s definitively feel to be part of a class, is now higher, as can be seen in the political independence from the parties supported by the coalowners.

The political change in South Wales, which has been reconstructed in the previous section, is undeniably linked to the emergence of the popular movement and the structuration of the new model of conflict. "Mining communities" redefine themselves "as working class entities, appropriately led by representatives of the most prominent working class institution of the age" (Williams 1996: 137 and Fagge 1997: 202). In the MFGB as a whole, after the 1909 affiliation, "gradually a new alignment began to emerge. ... By the mid-twenties ... the left was a coalition of communists and those sympathisers ... who remained within the Labour Party. The right included the bulk of districts officials and emphasised a 'realistic defense of miners' interests' " (Howell 1996: 37).

With the emergence of the popular movement and its new discourse of class, on the one hand, "there were developments making for a greater uniformity and commonality of experience, and thus it remains possible to describe South Wales miners ... as increasingly coming to share in a common industrial and political culture" (Williams 1996: 133). On the other hand, Welsh miners identify themselves with a popular movement which, through the discourse of class, is finding its integration at a British level (cf. Morgan 1974: 170-1; and McKibbin 1974: 168 and 241). There is nothing natural nor pre-determined in this process of constructing a popular movement with its independent political institution and a measure of the Welsh miners' achievement can be inferred from Fagge's (1997) comparative study with the experience of miners in West Virginia, who fail to build up an autonomous "political identity".

The antagonistic miners of the URC enter the Communist Party around 1920 and are sometimes able to gain positions of influence within the SWMF, as for instance in 1936 when one former URC leader is elected as president. On the other hand, if 'Mabon' is marginalised, "Lib-Labism" maintains a prominent position within the Welsh labour movement, primarily through a continuity of personnel from the early decades of the century (see Howell 1996: 38-9 and Morgan 1974: 172). In relation to the new model of conflict, former Lib.-Labs. redefine themselves as labourists. Labourism shares the principle of identity of the model of conflict - class; but prefers the institutionalisation of conflict to antagonism and refrains from utopias, trying

rather to influence the decision-making processes of the employers and, through the massive miners' presence within the Labour Party, of the political system. This is one side of the complex "image of the miners" nation-wide: "a reliable support for the party leadership, a loyalist ballast" (Howell 1996: 35). Durham miners support the right wing of the Labour Party in the 1950s, and in South Wales the "survivors" of Lib-Labism are repeatedly elected as SWMF presidents and MPs (see Austrin and Beynon 1994: xvi; Howell 1996: 38; Williams 1996: 126). In political terms, the prevalence of a strategy of parliamentarism and reformism is never seriously questioned. South Wales miners, "largely, supported a Labour Party that generally aimed to secure gradualist changes within the boundaries of the law" (Williams 1996: 141; for the relevance within the South Wales Labour Party of a socialist wing which combines political reformism with social antagonism see Fagge 1997: 203-4).

Insofar as labour action is redefined as class action with the emergence of the new model of conflict, it contains *both* a logic of social movement and a logic of interests. Labourist leaders of mining unionism primarily make reference to the latter (cf. Howell 42-3). For example, in the portrait of one mining MP in her diary, Beatrice Webb stresses his 'instinctive suspicion of all intellectuals or enthusiasts' (quoted in Howell 1996: 41). But also the leaders who are politically oriented to the Communist Party, the "auto-didacts of the coalfields" who maintain a perspective of transcending the social order, show "a pragmatism clear-sightedness and an ability to cooperate, conciliate and choose very carefully the grounds on which to fight" in matters of union policy (Williams 1996: 129 and 138). In Weber's terms (see 1991: 120-8), they

combine an "ethic of conviction" with an "ethic of responsibility". In the actuality of action, the perspective of overthrowing domination and struggling for a new social order is not uncoupled from taking into account the consequences of the course of action they are suggesting. In fact, for Communist leaders of mining unionism in South Wales, an identity rooted in the struggles of civil society prevails over political orientation (see the quotation in Egan 1996: 30-1). Unlike the bifurcated experience of the engineers, "leftwing organisations" in South Wales "inhabited a common cultural terrain suffused with a popular socialism, albeit one tied to occupational and trade union identification" (Williams 1996: 141).

When the logic of social movement is strong, the pursuit of interests gains momentum as well (on the victories of the miners from 1908 to 1915 see Howell 1996: 43; Egan 1996: 20; Bagwell 1971: 97; Hinton 1983: 105). This coincides with the growth of the popular movement itself, and decisively so, given other circumstances such as favourable conditions in the labour market and the growth of employment itself, which in South Wales reaches its all-time peak in 1920 (see Williams 1996: 126). Thus there is another facet of the image that the miners project into public opinion and the other components of the labour movement: miners "as sectional and inflexible" (Howell 1996: 35). The first term can contribute to accounting for the controversy which occurs in 1924 between the MFGB and the Labour Party, for the first time in office (see one mining leader quoted in *ibidem*: 45). The second term can be referred to the "epic" moments of the miners' experience. In the 1926 General Strike, the same miners of County Durham who provide "safe seats" for more than

one generation of gradualist Fabians, vote until the last ballot against the settlement and for continuing the mobilisation (see Austrin and Beynon 1994: ch. 13; 244 and 329). On these occasions work disputes become field battles; entire communities skirmish against both the agents of the social opponent such as strike-breakers and the repressive powers of the state; women gain an unusual prominence in the mobilisation;¹¹ the popular movement temporarily holds control of the territory (see *ibidem*: 219-23 and ch. 10). The defeat of 1926 marks the demise of the prospects for antagonistic miners to sustain their strategy of continuous mobilisation¹² and, consequently, the logic of social movement is relatively weakened. The process starts in the immediate post-war years when the economic crisis begins to hit the miners and weakens their strategic position in terms of the possibility of organising mobilisations both to pursue their interests and enhance their control of work organisation. From 1926, the miners are forced into a defensive posture to preserve the gains they have achieved in times of buoyant trade and full employment (see Williams 1996: 127 for data on the constant reduction of employment in the coal industry from 1926 to 1937 and the high rate of male unemployment across Wales). The membership which the MFGB affiliates to the Labour Party halves from 1925 to

¹¹ In South Wales "trade unions, trades councils and political parties" are "male-dominated preserves". Women are excluded from the bulk of the labour movement activities the more the latter are focussed on work relations. The activity of women's organisations is "generally limited to the articulation of 'welfarist' issues", an ancillary role which is accepted by female activists (Williams 1996: 39). In other geographical areas "women were ... drawn into Labour politics through campaigns" on urban issues, "notably housing"; there they "played a significant part in building and sustaining local Labour parties" (Thane 1992: 259).

¹² See the quotation from one transport unionist in 1927 contained in Weiler 1993: 48.

1930, but in the 1930s the strength of the popular movement is still overwhelming in the South Wales communities (see Howell 1996: 39 and Williams 1996: 138).

The distinction between a logic of social movement and a logic of interests, as analytical components of actual labour action, can also be traced in the experience of the Triple Alliance and is useful for the reconstruction of the debate within mining unionism at the national level. The Triple Alliance is formed in 1913 to co-ordinate the strategies of bargaining and mobilisation of the miners, railwaymen and transport workers. The leaders who are more oriented to the logic of social movement see the 'the control of industry' as "the ultimate aim of the Alliance" in a perspective where 'the centre of gravity was passing from the House of Commons to the headquarters of the great unions' (Bagwell 1971: 103-4). Instead, the majority of leaders ascribe a more limited goal to the experiment. For one of them, 'the predominant idea of the alliance is that each of these great fighting organisations, before embarking upon any big movement, either defensive or aggressive, should formulate its programme, submit it to the others, and that upon joint proposals joint action should be taken' (quoted in *ibidem*: 104). This view of the Alliance is consistent with a logic of labour action which limits itself to the pursuit of interests and is not tending towards the overthrow of the social order. And it is on the difficulty of co-ordinating the collective action of the workers at this level that the Alliance founders (see one mining leader in 1921 quoted in *ibidem*: 127).

The weakening of the logic of social movement within mining national unionism can

be seen in the evolution of the debate about how to reorganise industry so as to overcome private control over coalmines. When in 1919, under the pressure of a strong miners' action, Lloyd George appointed the Sankey Commission, "the MFGB was committed to a model of nationalisation which placed considerable emphasis upon workers' control", as it can be still seen in the Labour Party's manifesto of 1924. However, "after 1918 it became clear to many in the MFGB that they as a union would be unable to secure nationalisation; thus they looked to the Labour Party to form a Government and then nationalise the mines" (A. Taylor 1983: 176-7). The weakening of the logic of social movement thus means firstly a shift of prevalence from labour action to the political wing of the popular movement. Progressively from the early 1930s on, moreover, the perspective of workers' control loses ground to more "technocratic" plans based on "the organisational principle ... of the public board composed of experts" who "would be appointed by the responsible Minister (who would be in turn be responsible to Parliament)". Despite initial resistance from some union quarters, such a scheme, which was adopted by the 1929 Labour government for "the reorganisation of public transport in London", provided a blueprint on which all the designs for nationalization of industry after 1945 were broadly based' (ibidem: 178-82).¹³

The prevalence of the political wing can also be detected in one example of development of the popular movement at a local level, which can be analysed to

¹³ For the improvement, however, of miners' condition after nationalisation, see the reminiscences by Durham miners quoted in Beynon and Austrin 1994: 186. This goes some way to explain why the Communist miners of South Wales, once syndicalists, "welcomed" it (Egan 1996: 47).

illustrate different dynamics from the ones reconstructed for South Wales (see also Savage 1987: 195-8). In Glasgow, after the eclipse of the Clyde Workers' Committee and with the Communist Party never able to achieve the leadership of the movement, it is the ILP which succeeds in integrating the popular strata. This process is coterminous with the electoral growth of the Labour Party from 1919 on, which culminates in 1922 by when "the Labour Party had ... constructed a machine which could get out Labour majorities for local elections in almost all the wards falling into working-class constituencies" (McLean 1983: 161-3). According to McLean, two major processes lead to the development of the popular movement and Labour electoral success in the town: the agitations on the issue of rent and the ILP's ability to establish an alliance with the Irish-Catholic community. In Glasgow a powerful trade union movement pre-exists and develops alongside the early ILP's attempts to establish a meaningful presence on the Clyde. In Joan Smith's reconstruction, the prominent component of the political culture of organised labour is constituted by the Gladstonian brand of Radicalism (1984: in particular p. 34).

In 1915, agitations develop on the issue of rent throughout the town; in those areas where the mobilisation is more intense, munitions and shipyard workers go on strike to augment the pressure of the neighbourhood communities engaged in resisting rent increases and evictions. Indeed, under the pressure of the Glasgow mobilisation, the government is forced to concede an act which puts the cost of rents under control (McLean 1983: 17-27; Melling 1979). On the issue of housing, exasperated by the immigration that wartime production attracts, the Glasgow Trades Council has been

active from the late 1880s, whilst the local Liberals have been developing a 'progressive' policy of gas and water municipalisation in the City Council (see Smith 1984: 36 and 51). In 1915 the institutional representation of the rent agitations is taken by John Wheatley, a leading exponent of the ILP, who has been influential on the engineers' mobilisations and has also promoted the organisation of a Catholic Socialist Society within the Irish community (ibidem: 36-7; McLean 1983). The ILP encourages the creation of a ramified association of tenants and, through it, succeeds in building up "an efficient ward organisation". It is also through this activity in support of the self-organisation of the popular strata, and as part of a Scotland-wide process, that the Labour Party is able to supplant the Liberal Party in the representation of the labour movement (see Smith 1984: 34).

Joan Smith's reconstruction of political change highlights how the strong tradition of Radical trade unionism represents one favourable condition for the development of a Socialist movement and, consequently though unintendedly, for political change. The unions of skilled workers, as it was seen above when discussing the engineers' protests, maintain a traditional distance from the unskilled as far as mobilisation within civil society is concerned. However, the Radical political culture helps not to stiffen the divide between skilled and unskilled through its overlapping with the division between the Protestant and Catholic communities. This Glasgow peculiarity is given prominence in Smith's reconstruction which is conducted in comparative terms with the contemporaneous experience of Liverpool, another large urban area where the presence of Irish immigrants is remarkable. In Glasgow the Socialist

movement "became the strongest in Britain" (see Smith 1984: 38 for the description of the impressive May Day parade in 1909; see *ibidem*: pp. 39-40 and 47-49 on the reasons for the weakness of the popular movement in Liverpool).

The reference to progress and to the democratic argument about people's sovereignty which is a component part of the Liberal-Radical discourse in Glasgow, thus proves to provide a fertile soil for the development of a powerful Socialist presence. The campaign on the issue of housing, and then the institutional policy successfully advocated by the ILP, are an extension of themes already developed within Radical discourse. The latter, however, had never advocated the proposal of massive public spending in order to build houses for the popular strata, which is the contribution that Glasgow Socialists provide for the British popular movement as a whole (see Smith 1984: 36; McLean 1983: 229). Socialist discourse is however better suited than Radicalism to promote the integration of skilled and unskilled strata into the same popular movement. Socialists are indeed able to win the support of the Irish community in a context where "not all unskilled were Irish, but most of the Irish were unskilled" (McLean 1983: 181). It is, according to McLean, the change in the policy of Labour on the issue of drinking in 1921 that proves decisive for the switch of the Irish allegiance towards the new party (see *ibidem*: for instance p. 241). One might over-cynically regard this move of abandoning a prohibitionist stance as expediency (see, for instance, *ibidem*: 182 and 186), but at the risk of neglecting the discontinuity represented by Socialist discourse on this issue, a point which has already been highlighted above, when discussing Keir Hardie's "conversion" in the late 1880s (see

5-3 and also below 6-3). Indeed the Glasgow ILP leaders have been criticising, long before, the Liberal argument that "poverty was due to moral weakness, especially the moral weakness that led to drink. They opposed the temperance movement, although they themselves were often individually temperate - and especially the temperance argument that if workers didn't drink they wouldn't be poor" (Smith 1984: 35-6).¹⁴

The autonomous movement, which is able to integrate skilled, unskilled workers and unwaged women¹⁵ from the popular strata, develops in Glasgow on a urban-political terrain rather than, as it was seen in South Wales, on the ground of civil society and with a predominance of the union wing of the movement. The CWC issues a manifesto which is addressed to all Clydeside workers, but is unable to integrate the different popular strata around the conflict at the level of civil society. On the contrary, it is the ILP which, in leading the self-organisation of the popular strata on

¹⁴ On the "tightly knit community" of the Irish in Glasgow and their political debate, see McLean 1983: 185; 189-91 and 195. It is also necessary to point out that the political integration of the popular strata in Glasgow does not obliterate the distinction between the honest worker who is entitled to live a decent life and the 'undeserving poor', when the popular movement debates the issues related to state welfare (ibidem: 232; see also Thane 1984: 884 for the same point in relation to the discourse of the national labour movement). However, this should not be interpreted as the repositioning of a rift between poles of popular culture and strata of workers which was prevailing in mid-Victorian decades, as was shown above (5-2 and 5-4) when the association of the discourse of class with work ethic was highlighted in both Tom Mann and Hardie.

¹⁵ On the importance of women in urban mobilisations and in the Glasgow Socialist movement, see McLean 1983: 27; A. Reid 1986: 93-4; Smith 1984: 37 and 42-3. The decisive contribution by Labour women to the development of ward organisation and penetration in slum areas has been stressed with reference to the experiences of Preston and Wolverhampton (see Savage 1987: 173 and Lawrence 1998: 157-60).

urban issues, gains the leadership of the movement and achieves the same political change for which the SWMF is to be credited in South Wales. This process of self-organisation and integration of the different popular strata occurs nation-wide, in Bernard Waites' reconstruction, during the wartime years. On the issue of food shortages Food Vigilance Committees, "a combination of local activists - usually local Labour Parties, trades councils and cooperators", are organised and mobilisations develop in the late 1917-early 1918 in many towns across the country. In them the ASE, which is otherwise unable to converge with the unskilled in the struggles against the employers, takes a prominent part (see Waites 1987: 227-30). It is thanks to these mobilisations and through the development of a critical discourse against 'profiteering' that, according to Waites, arguments of class polarisation acquire salience within the public debate. A new meaning of class, which makes reference to a dichotomous image of British society, imposes itself alongside the classic tripartition where 'the working classes' are defined according to criteria of income stratification and status (see Waites 1987: 34-75 and 1976).

This new meaning of class is closer to the one elaborated by antagonistic workers such as Tom Mann, South Wales miners and Clyde engineers. However, here the emphasis is less on industrial workers, seen in their workplaces, than on popular strata considered as families in their neighbourhood, or as citizens in relation to the state or municipal authorities (see Melling 1979). Issues such as housing and income redistribution call for an intervention of political power (see examples in Waites

1987: 222-3). Consequently, a relatively higher prominence is bestowed on the political wing of the popular movement, as the prevalent perspective becomes the conquest of political power or, at least, the gain of some influence in the decision-making process of the political system. Urban struggles develop far from the locus of work relations and the conflict for the control of work organisation: the opponents of popular strata in these struggles are not the employers or their management, but landlords and their agents, and political authorities. Thus, on the one hand these opponents are cast, through the polarisation of class discourse, in the general category of 'them' which includes also, during wartime, "profiteers, hoarders, disciplinary tribunals in the munitions industry" (ibidem: 224; see also pp. 179-80). On the other hand, however, the more the integration of popular strata occurs through mobilisations at an urban level, the less tenable is the claim for the leadership of the movement by workers organised in industrial unions or workshop committees; and the discourse of the popular movement is more oriented towards arguments which advocate equality rather than the claim for freedom of both antagonistic miners and engineers (see above 6-1).

This tendency towards a prevalence of political over labour action which can be seen in Glasgow, and was also noted above (5-4) when reconstructing the emergence of the popular movement in the West Riding of Yorkshire,¹⁶ might be compatible both with a radical and a reformist political strategy. In political terms, a reformist strategy

¹⁶ According to Savage (1987: 194), "the Labour Party underwent a fundamental change in character in the early 1920s in many areas: it changed from a party based on certain trade unions to one based on neighbourhood organisation".

which attempts the conquest of political power through parliamentary means, prevails in Glasgow as we have seen it does in South Wales, where, on the contrary, the popular movement is integrated around the union, namely the workers' institution which is operating primarily within civil society. The option in favour of reformism rather than for a radical strategy which would challenge the sovereignty of the state, is thus independent from the prevalence of political over labour action within the popular movement.

Instead, a reformist political option is partly related to the relative prevalence, within labour action, of the logic of interests over the logic of social movement, a distinction which was utilised above when discussing the experience of mining unionism both in South Wales and at a national level. As it was argued, this distinction does not rigidly overlap with the different currents within the Miners' Federation. Indeed, antagonistic miners are also bearers of a logic of interests, firstly because they would be otherwise unable to retain the leadership of the rank and file, and secondly because class discourse does not reject a logic of interests, but includes local and particular struggles as instances of a conflict against one general opponent. However, as pluralist sociologists such as Pizzorno argue, a logic of interests in itself pushes labour action towards formulating negotiable issues (see above 2-1). As it was seen above, the "craft militancy" of the engineers does not develop the integrative discourse of class and, consequently, is unable to conceive of a challenge to social power at a general level. Thus the logic of interests, to the extent that it constitutes the prevalent analytical component within actual labour action, is not faced with the

problem of transcending the social order which might lead to a politically radical strategy (see in Weiler 1993: 49 the quotation from Ernest Bevin in the late 1920s, where he argues that the attainment of workers' interests 'cannot wait for the demise of the capitalist system').¹⁷

On the other hand, the political strategy of reformism is more consistent with that interpretation of the new model of class conflict which was defined above as labourist. Labourist leaders accept both the progressive discourse and the class identity which have been articulated by the new labour action. However, they are more oriented than the antagonistic workers towards the possibilities for institutionalising class conflict, up to the point that the furthest horizon they envisage for labour action is not a labour-dominated society, but industrial and economic democracy (see 5-3 and 6-3). Also in this case a strategy of political radicalism is not contemplated, at least in principle.

Yet, despite these links with the actuality of labour action, the prevalence of a reformist strategy within the political wing of the British labour movement is also to be explained by taking into account independently the actual openness of the political system.¹⁸ The development of the Labour Party in Glasgow, for instance, witnesses

¹⁷ The prevalence of a parliamentary and institutional strategy in the Labour Parties of Bradford and Glasgow has been explained with the predominance of the trade unions over the ILP (see respectively Reynolds and Laybourn 1975: 340 and McKinlay 1990: 56-7). According to B. Barker (1973: 7), on the contrary, the leadership of the Labour Party in Yorkshire is in the hands of the ILP.

¹⁸ On the reformist/revolutionary dilemma see also Tanner 1991 and 1997b, who emphasises the

the marginalisation of those leaders who are oriented towards a politically radical strategy, whilst John Wheatley is nominated Minister of Health in 1924 and promotes the Housing Act, which offers "subsidies to local authorities to build houses" (McLean 1983: 205; 211; 216-8). (see above 5-2). B. Barker's analysis of the discourse developed by the Labour leadership in Yorkshire during the early decades of the new century confirms the consolidation of a gradualist and constitutional strategy for socialism, which prevails by either attracting or marginalising those leaders who are more oriented to a politically radical strategy (see B. Barker 1973: 8-11 and *ibidem*: 18 for a clear ILP's statement of reformism in the memorandum sent to the International Socialist Congress in 1920).

3 - Political and unionist labourism

The option of political reformism in Yorkshire goes along, however, with the reference to an autonomous popular movement that is formed around labour identity, and to a class polarisation of which the Labour Party intends to represent one side (cf. B. Barker's 1973: 8). It is then the actuality of a new popular movement emerging from the late 1880s, that marks the discontinuity of British popular politics and the distinctiveness of a new political identity, whose emergence cannot be explained with the changes brought about by wartime (see also Martin 1985: 32 and above 6-1 for

Europe-wide character of this debate in the labour and Socialist movements.

references to the debate).¹⁹

The constitution of 1918 sanctions the Labour Party as an alliance between, on the one hand, Socialists and Labourists, and, on the other hand, between the political and the union wings of the labour movement (on the complexity of the Labour Party's outlook, see also Tanner 1991: 293). Thus, whilst Clause Four maintains the perspective of transcending the social order in highlighting the socialist identity of the Party, the leadership of the political wing of the movement is, before 1920 and afterwards, in the hands of Labourists. We have recounted the weakening of the logic of social movement in those situations where it has been at its strongest - namely among South Wales miners and the engineers on the Clyde. Within the trade-union component, this process allows, on the one hand, the prevalence of the logic of interests and, on the other, the growing prominence of an orientation towards the institutionalisation of class conflict. The prevalence of a Labourist leadership within the trade-union wing ensures the election of Labourists such as Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald as leaders of the Party, thanks to an internal electoral system which gives overwhelming influence to the unions (see McKibbin 1974: 91-106; 126; 240-4). It is this prevalence of Labourism which is utilised as empirical evidence by those scholars who want to stress the continuity of the new political identity (a "distinctive 'British socialism'") with an older Radical tradition going back to the

¹⁹ On the effects of caesura in terms of mass psychology which were brought about by the slaughter of the First World War and on the ambivalent effects of the "comradeship of the trenches" for the development of discourses of national community and/or class polarisation, see Waites 1987: 60-1; 181, 183-4, 186-93, 203-4, 220-3, 232-9; and Winter 1985: 367-8.

Gladstonian coalition and re-adapted, by the New Liberal advocacy of state intervention into the market, towards a collectivist perspective (see for instance Thane 1991: in part, pp. 261 and 263 and Shepherd 1992: 210).

Compelling evidence supports the argument of continuity. New Liberal activists and intellectuals join Labour in 1918 in the midst of the dissolution of the Liberal Party, but not as a consequence of any change in their worldview (B. Barker 1973: 4-6; Clarke 1983: 8). Arthur Henderson, formerly electoral agent for the Liberals, is elected as Labour MP as representative of the Friendly Society of Ironfounders in 1903, but he interprets the event as a mere change of institutional loyalty on behalf of his trade union, rather than as an ideological and political conversion (McKibbin 1994: 46-7; Brown 1985: 11). One strand of the Radical argument - popular sovereignty and the claims for the accountability and democratic control of political authorities - is undoubtedly absorbed into the discourse of the Labour Party, both by its Labourist and Socialist wings (Thane 1991: 252 and 263; Tanner 1991: 288).

A discussion of the similarities and discontinuities between Liberals and Labour is central in Thane's work which is devoted to reconstructing the stance adopted by the labour movement towards the emerging welfare state from the early 1900s on. As she argues, the viewpoint of the majority of workers in the years between 1880 and 1914 is of "opposition to state action or to private philanthropy which was inquisitorial [and] which sought to impose standards of behaviour upon the working class". Conversely,

they were accepting "reform which was non-punitive, redistributive and conferred real material improvement" (Thane 1984: 895). Thane remarks on the growing popular participation from the 1880s in mobilisations concerning their interests²⁰ and how this movement is represented at the local level initially by 'Progressive' coalitions, indifferent to either Radical or Labour/Socialist labels, and then by the Labour Party (Thane 1991: 245-254). In parliament the policies supported by Labour in the years 1906-1914 differ, in some cases, only in quantitative terms from the measures introduced by Liberal governments (see Thane 1985: 187). She remarks that the suspicion towards some Liberal policies is partly due to the mere necessity of competing for the political representation of the same movement and for the electoral support of the same strata (ibidem: 199). Thane, however, also emphasises that social reforms might be administered by non-Labour politicians against labour interests, like the recruitment of blacklegs, through the labour exchanges introduced in 1909, on the occasion of a railway strike in 1913 (Thane 1984: 898). Thus it is, on the one hand, the reference to work conflict and the union movement that marks a distance between progressive Liberals and the Labour Party. On the other hand, the policies pursued by Labour in parliament mark a distance also from Gladstonian Lib-Labism which cannot be reduced to the influence of New Liberalism. The skilled unionists who sit in parliament under the Labour whip now support the interests of the popular strata as a whole, thus articulating the new identity of class which is being expressed in the

²⁰ Thane (1984: 886, 893 and 895) intends to rectify Pelling's argument (1958: 1-18) which overstates workers' indifference to welfare measures. On the different (minority) components of the movement which are suspicious or decidedly opposed to the extension of state intervention in favour of the popular strata, see Thane 1984: 892-3; 879-80 and 897-9.

popular movement organised at the urban level (Thane 1985: 189 and 191; for emphasis on discontinuity see Thane 1991: 270; and Tanner 1997b: 50, 56, 64 and 66).

In this chapter the emergence of a new autonomous popular movement has been connected to the structuration of a new model of conflict by labour action from the late 1880s. In the same way, a link was established between the structuration of the artisan model of conflict and the autonomy of popular action in the first half of the 19th century (see above ch. 3). With the new popular movement the integration of popular strata occurs around the dimension of class, which is extended from work conflict to urban mobilisations. As it was argued above, the model of work conflict is more central to the popular movement as a whole. This marks a difference with Chartism, when the integration of popular strata occurred around the discourse of political Radicalism, namely around a dimension which is external to the model of work conflict (see above 3-7). Thus the new model of conflict can be utilised for the analytical purpose of reconstructing the different experiences and discourses of the leaders of the popular movement. In this way I shall proceed to analyse, in the course of this section, the trajectory of three leading figures of political or unionist Labourism: Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson and Ernst Bevin. This procedure has already been followed in previous sections when discussing the contribution by the Webbs and Keir Hardie to the emergence of the popular movement (see 5-1; 5-3 and 5-4). There their experience was interpreted as selective appropriation of the

dimensions of identity, opposition and totality within the model of conflict (see above 3-1). It will be shown that it is also possible to employ this procedure to gain some interpretative purchase on the experience of Labourism, despite the actual distance of its discourse from the new model of work conflict and the arguments of class identity, class struggle and workers' power that it articulates (see above 5-2 and 6-1). The analysis will reconstruct the experience of characters who assume positions of leadership in either the political or the union component of the movement, on the presupposition that this task allows one to shed some light on the directions taken by popular action as a whole in the 1920s. The exposition will analyse the discourses of MacDonald, Henderson and Bevin in that order, according to a criterion of decreasing distance from the model of conflict. The employment of the latter as an analytical tool also allows the reconstruction to highlight more pronounced assertions in favour of the autonomy of the movement, as long as the exposition moves from MacDonald to Bevin. Because of the actual link between work conflict and the autonomy of a popular movement which is primarily a labour movement, the more the experience of one leader is situated in proximity to the new model of conflict, the more the autonomy of the movement from its opponents is asserted in discourse and defended in practice.

One main difference between MacDonald and Henderson on the one side, and Bevin on the other, is a claim for the relative prevalence of either the political or the union component of the movement; a debate that was seen in previous sections to have developed within the Socialist wing of the movement and which is replicated among

the Labourists. For instance, in the dramatic event of the internal crisis in 1931, MacDonald asserts the independence of the Party from the TJC with the argument that 'so soon as a Parliamentary Party subordinates itself to the edicts of any non Parliamentary body, it ceases to be responsible. ... The political order in society must ever be the supreme organ and its responsibility belongs to itself' (quoted in Howell 1996: 44). This claim can be extended into a request for interfering into the decision-making process of the unions, as when in 1920 Henderson complains that 'the Miners' claim has been kept strictly in the hands of the industrial wing, as though it had no relation or bearing on the political situation' (quoted in McKibbin 1994: 57). The prevalence of the political wing is represented by Henderson and MacDonald in the context of an opposition between the general interest, which Labour as the 'national people's party' would represent, and the sectionalism of the unions' logic of interests (see the quotation from Henderson in *ibidem*: 53 and 55; and from MacDonald in Watts 1998: 115 and Tanner 1991: 278).

The link between the discourse developed by MacDonald and the new model of conflict is found in the progressive argument for the 'elimination of every kind of inefficiency and waste' and 'the application of ... more science and intelligence to every branch of the nation's work' (quoted in B. Barker 1973: 16; see also Tanner 1997b: 56). If then MacDonald endorses the principle of totality of the new model of conflict in its component of the discourse of progress (see above 5-1), he is very far both from its principles of opposition and of identity. MacDonald's eschewing of any notion of social conflict is coterminous with his lack of reference, if not hostility, to

the self-organised action of popular strata unless this is channelled by the parliamentary component of the movement. This can be evinced from his stance on the 1926 general strike (see Watts 1998: 83). If MacDonald can share with Hardie the argument that it is "selfish individualism" which breeds "class antagonism", the latter maintains in 1912 that strikes are "an opportunity to mobilise public opinion ..., displaying and keeping alive the 'spirit of rebellion' which would 'awaken society and revolutionise it along Socialist lines' " (Mendilow 1986: 210; Tanner 1991: 282). On the contrary, MacDonald, in his critique of syndicalism of the same year, on the one hand emphasises a determinist interpretation of social change, which makes autonomous popular action redundant if not damaging. On other hand, he opposes reason to the emotions of class solidarity, "which in policy discussions increasingly became deference to conventional experts" (see McKibbin 1994: 58; Watts 1998: 33-4; Tanner 1991: 277 and 283). Thus MacDonald keeps reference to socialism, as he seeks some degree of nationalisation of the economy (see for instance Thane 1991: 266-7), but his discourse is devoid of critical edge against the social order (see Tanner 1991: 278 and also Beatrice Webb's comment in 1926 quoted in Watts 1998: 88). His vision of a conflict-free society is not deferred to a future which transcends present relations of domination; rather, MacDonald pervasively employs "the analogy of society as an organism" (R. Barker 1974: 124; Thane 1991: 269 and the quotation in in Thane 1991: 262). Losing touch with the materiality of civil society - of both interests and relations of domination -, the ethical component which is articulated within the principle of totality of the model of conflict (see above 5-1) becomes "windy" in MacDonald's discourse or mere "platform rhetoric" in Snowden's, as

critics such as Stephen Yeo (1977: 44) and E.P. Thompson (1971: 292) have denounced. Thus, in 1930, MacDonald suggests that 'they were moving, as it were, in a great eternal ocean of surge towards righteousness, towards fair play, towards honesty'. The vacuity of this remark is all the more noticeable as this is uttered in the midst of the most severe economic crisis and dramatic fracture within the movement, while MacDonald's government proves unable to break the mould of Gladstonian financial orthodoxy, and to devise an alternative policy to the cuts in unemployment pay requested by the industrialists and the Conservative opposition (quoted in Watts: 98; see *ibidem*: 97-100).

The discourse and practice of Arthur Henderson is also widely distant from the principle of opposition of the new model of conflict. Before being elected to parliament, Henderson works as "secretary and senior workers' representative in the North East Conciliation Board" for his Ironfounders' Society. Indeed "until the 1920s much of his time was spent in industrial conciliation" and into this activity Henderson pours unchanged the experience of mid-Victorian skilled unionism (see above 4-2). The emergence of the popular movement and his new political loyalty do not bring any change in his view of work relations. As he puts it in 1918: 'The idea that the relationships between capital and labour must necessarily be antagonistic must be abandoned on both sides'. In the context of the structuration of the model of conflict by class action, Henderson relabels, -"increasingly after 1917" - his advocacy of 'co-operation' as 'democratic control of industry', which is fairly distant, however, from the utopia of the workplaces managed by the workers as advocated by antagonistic

miners and engineers (see above 6-1). In fact, according to McKibbin, industrial democracy for Henderson means no alteration of power relations within the factory apart from the recognition of union presence, decency in labour-management relations, "mutual respect and courtesy" and 'the humanising of all the conditions of ... employment'. Henderson's emphasis on 'the community, whose interests were being seriously endangered' by industrial strife, underpins, on the one hand, his assertion of the prevalence of the political party within the movement and, on the other, his support both for arbitration and for attempts at institutionalising work conflict, such as the Industrial Councils of 1912-3 and the Whitley Councils of 1917 (McKibbin 1994: 51-55; cf. Pelling 1963: 160).

In McKibbin's view, a change is however discernible in Henderson's experience after 1917, which explains his choice in 1931 of remaining faithful to the Labour Party and the TUC. There develops in Henderson a "sense of loyalty" to the labour movement that "sharply distinguishes" him "from MacDonald". "Although he strongly disapproved of a number of working-class political and industrial habits, ... the few times he was 'off-side' with the movement were the occasions of severe mental distress. ... By mid-August 1931, when almost everyone was admitting of the need to think 'nationally' ..., Henderson 'launched into eloquence on the inadequacy of the unemployed grants...' ". He allows "the government to collapse, ... rather than 'get wrong' with the movement". It is on the basis of his sharing the principle of identity of the model of conflict that Henderson defends the autonomy of the movement, whereas MacDonald goes to the general election on the side of the Conservatives and

against Labour (McKibbin 1994: 58; 61-2; Watts 1998: 108-113 and 120-5).

According to McKibbin, Henderson's "solidarity with his class" develops primarily through his cultural belonging in terms of sharing the same life-style as the rank and life. On the contrary, MacDonald admits: 'I do not believe I have ever understood the working of the ordinary mind, it is not interested in an impartial truth, it works only on nerves and impulses'. As Snowden comments, MacDonald has 'a desire to be regarded as a gentleman by other parties' (McKibbin 1994: 60-1; Tanner 1991: 277; Watts 1998: 52). As a Methodist, Henderson is definitely oriented towards the respectable pole of working-class culture. However, temperance has become object of fierce debate *within* the movement (see McKibbin 1994: 44 and 48), but is no longer an issue which contributes to justify organisational and political division among workers. It is the process of constructing a class identity, the identification of social opponents and the critique of the inequalities of wealth distribution which allow Labour to renounce "moralistic preaching". In this way Labour succeeds in building up or in politically representing a "local communal solidarity, especially in municipal politics", which is able to attract, particularly in Lancashire and London, popular strata gravitating during the 1890s into the orbit of popular Conservatism because of their orientation towards the rough pole of working-class culture (see Tanner 1991: 292 and above 4-4 and 4-5).²¹ The integration of popular strata is a parallel process to their articulation of an autonomous discourse and the construction of independent organisations, as it was for the popular movement of the early nineteenth century.

²¹ As Tanner (1991: 292) notes, working-class Tories can switch their support to the Labour Party also

Skilled and unskilled, teetotallers and pubgoers take part in the same movement. "Unity of the movement and, by implication, class solidarity" now becomes Henderson's "chief political tactic" and "by July 1934 the founder figure of post-war social democracy" advocates an anti-fascist alliance with the Communists employing expressions that, according to McKibbin (1994: 62), "might have come from a Comintern handout".

The concern for the autonomy of the movement is even more central in the discourse and practice of Ernest Bevin, where it is asserted as claim for the independence of the trade unions both from the employers and the political party. The autonomy of organised labour is based on the argument that 'governments may come and governments may go, but the workers' fight for the betterment of conditions must go on all the time' (quoted in Howell 1986: 44; see also Weiler 1993: 53). The dynamics of dispute and negotiation in civil society are considered to be more under the control of the workers than the dynamics within the political system. Thus the autonomy of the labour movement is, first of all, linked to the logic of interests within labour action.²² Bevin associates the acknowledgement of this reference to interests, in the action of the individual worker, with the autonomy of popular culture, which is to be defended against those intellectuals who patronise the narrow-mindedness of the average workingman. 'You can make a great speech to [the British Trade Unionist]

for its constitutionalist option in political terms.

²² The prevalence of the unions is justified by the historical argument that 'it was not Keir Hardie who formed [the Labour Party], it grew out of the bowels of the Trade Union Congress' (Bevin in Weiler 1993: 70).

but when you have finished he will say: "What about funeral benefits" ' (quoted in Weiler 1993: 68). However, on the one hand, Bevin's distrust of intellectuals does not prevent him from collaborating with people like G.D.H. Cole, and from grasping "the significance of Keynesian economics" in order to devise an alternative policy to the Conservative government which rules Britain after the Labour disaster of 1931 (Weiler 1993: 71-3). On the other hand, Bevin's conception of labour action cannot be exhausted by this reference to a logic of interests, since he clearly articulates the principle of identity of the new model of conflict in advocating the integration of workers irrespective of their skill (see Weiler 1993: 32).

Bevin's reference to a class identity is less surprising once one takes into account that his experience as a worker and a unionist unfolds in a branch, that of the transport workers, whose organisational tradition is far removed from craft unionism. But, in Bevin's discourse, the link with the model of conflict is also established in relation to the principle of totality, given that a powerful strand in his argument is the reference to progress and the rationalisation of work process. In order to raise the 'standard of living' of the workers, an issue felt heavily by his dockers, Bevin advocates 'scientific effort' against 'the dead hand of the past' which thwarts British industry (Weiler 1993: 69; cf. also *ibidem*: 50 and also pp. 74-5). The rise in productivity will allow higher wages, thanks to the intervention of independent unionism, whereas the application of science to industrial activity will render production systematic and 'decasualise' the dockers (*ibidem*: 17; 32 and 50; see also above 5-2 for the continuities with Mann's discourse in the late 1880s).

To the extent that, in the early 1920s, Bevin sees the foundation of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) as part of a process which, however gradual, "would make it possible ... for the dockers ... eventually to gain the 'control of industry' ", his hopes are shattered by the defeat in the 1926 General Strike (see Weiler 1993: 38-9; 48). In addition, the reference to the logic of interests entails that the union leadership is also guided by the ethics of responsibility. As Bevin says, 'I do not want to be in a position to sacrifice the men or to victimise them before I am sure of their strength' (quoted in *ibidem*: 34 and 24 for the weakness of transport workers in the labour market by 1920). Once the perspective of transcending the social order has faded away, Bevin re-orientes labour action by defining industrial and economic democracy as its furthest horizon. Developing ideas that he has already conceived in 1917, Bevin advocates an alliance between the unions and the large "progressive" industrialists of the "expansive newer" sectors such as chemicals. They have to put pressure on the state so that the latter engages in 'planning and reorganisation, particularly in the basic industries', manages "financial policy to insure industrial expansion" and offers "large contributions to research, organised marketing and distribution" (*ibidem*: 17; 49; 51; 57; 59).

Bevin's discourse does represent the relationship between employers and management, on the one side, and workers on the other, as a matter of domination and power (see quotations from him in Weiler 1993: 38 and 18; cf. also Waites 1987: 67). Bevin's proposal to the industrialists for co-operation is thus not an appeal to their

goodwill. Moreover, the proposal for the institutionalisation of social conflict, by which unions would be recognised and, in turn, would collaborate with the industrialists' strategies of work rationalisation, does not wipe out the argument about the necessity of maintain the autonomy of the unions. Consequently Bevin welcomes the Whitley Report of 1917 but prefers collective bargaining, as the institution of industrial relations, rather than the joint councils (*ibidem*: 18; see also Waites 1987: 66-8).

Thus, the proposal for co-operation with the industrialists, on the one hand, responds to the interests of the workers; on the other, makes sense for Bevin to the extent that the employers are prepared to pursue 'progressive' strategies in the organisation of production and in industrial relations. Workers' pursuit of interests is also justified in the context of the central place that industry has taken in the economy: 'The workers who really do the work of the world should have the best', argues Bevin (quoted in Weiler 1993: 28). The claim for economic democracy, namely the labour movement's argument that the unions have a right to influence the economic policy of the country (see *ibidem*: for instance p. 70), is justified by this identification of workers with production. It is also on such a basis that collaboration with social opponents is possible; in particular with 'the managerial staff', since in Bevin's view " 'the combined Labour in the industry', meaning management and workers, shared an interest in increased production" (*ibidem*: 31 and 69). The idea of an alliance in the name of industrial modernisation, between the unions, private industrialists and the state, singles out financial interest as the rival (see *ibidem*: 47, 51 and 57). However,

it would be inaccurate to interpret this argument in continuity with the Chartist "calling for the union of the industrious classes" against "the idle rich" (see Tanner 1991: 278). As was argued above (see in particular 3-7), the conflict structured in the early 19th century by the trade communities against middlemen and market-oriented masters, was represented in moral terms and was antagonistic to the extent that artisans' action maintained a reference both to the defence of customary work practices and to an utopia of self-managed communities. In the case of the discourse of the new popular movement, there occurs a two-phase - in both logical and actual terms - process. First, antagonistic miners and engineers identify a social opponent because of his control of work organisation and investment decisions, in this way structuring the model of class conflict. Then, the possibility is asserted by Bevin and others that this conflict might be institutionalised through an alliance in the name of progress with those strata, among the opponents, who appear to be most inclined to modernise and rationalise the work process.

Once collective bargaining is seen in the context of the institutionalisation of work conflict, a restructuring of the internal organisation of the unions is deemed necessary by Bevin in terms of the relationship between centre and periphery. The union which chooses the path of the institutionalisation of work conflict cannot tolerate unofficial action, especially in the context of the weak position that the unskilled transport worker occupies in the labour market. According to Bevin, "the union's strength" is "its ability 'to demonstrate that [it] represented what it claimed.' " (cf. Weiler 1993: 37). As was seen above, Bevin endorses the principle of identity of the new model of

conflict by articulating the argument of class. At the same time he redefines the principles of opposition and totality as enunciated by Tom Mann: antagonism is transformed into the institutionalisation of conflict, and the utopia of workplaces and society as absolutely controlled by the workers into industrial and economic democracy. Bevin's conception of unionism shows, however, how far he has travelled from the experience of South Wales miners and Clydeside engineers. In Bevin's discourse the partners of management in the co-operative running of industry and economy are the 'paid delegates of the Union' (ibidem: 31), rather than the forms of workplace democracy that the antagonistic workers have rethought or invented and that they propose as the foundation for reconstructing work organisation, society, and the unions themselves (see above 6-1). As Weiler remarks, Bevin's discourse plays down the argument of workers' direct control of their own work (ibidem: 50 and 74), whereas it lays stress on the possibility for the unions to influence the social and economic policy of the country and the industrial policies of the companies.²³ Consequently union bureaucracy is considered to be more crucial than the rank and file, for the labour movement to attain its aims. That might be explained because of the weakness experienced by dockers' unionism, which revives and gains stability

²³ The unions will put pressure on the government, firstly because 'the State must accept responsibility for unemployment', and secondly in order to redistribute wealth so that the worker is provided both with " 'status' and the possibility of 'culture and opportunity' " (see Weiler 1993: 17; 27-9; 54). The union will also influence the industrial policy of the companies co-operating in their activity of planning, seen as an alternative mechanism of resource allocation to the market (see Weiler 1993: 74-5). As Bevin writes in 1917: 'it is not difficult to picture the possibility of the management and the organised producers in the industry sitting around the table with all the commercial knowledge at their disposal...., taking into consideration the amount of available working, together with the mechanical appliances; and produce the amount required to supply the communal needs...' (quoted in ibidem: 17).

only in coincidence with the wave of protest of the early 1910s (see Hobsbawm 1968: 194-3). Unlike South Wales miners and engineers, dockers are not endowed with that autonomy at work which might grant them some control of work organisation. On that basis antagonistic workers have been able to conceive of a future when their technical ability would allow them to master the mines and the factories and then, given the relevance of their activity for the national economy, society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

In the analysis of the two popular movements, which developed in Britain during the nineteenth century, I have firstly proceeded to retrace their main empirical components. For instance, within the movement emerging from the late 1880s, I have considered the components that develop on the terrain of work relations and those originating from the urban condition. The two kinds of collective action raise claims which relate to different features of the condition of popular strata as well as identifying different opponents: labour action targets the organisers of work, whereas urban conflict takes the town's elite and the administrative-political authorities as its opponents.

Within labour action I have distinguished between the analytical components of the *logic of the social movement* and of the *logic of interests*. In the interpretation of the two popular movements, I have highlighted the relationship between the emergence of the logic of social movement, within the collective action of artisans and industrial workers, and processes by which working people and popular strata developed autonomous discourses and institutions. The logic of social movement maintains a reference to material interests, but also seeks to transcend the social order, by envisaging the utopia of a society without domination. Therefore, through its critical discourse, the collective action that bears a logic of social movement, establishes a link between particular struggles and one general conflict against a social opponent. Consequently, the logic of social movement is also able to integrate the action of different sections of tradesmen and workers within the

same mobilised collectivity.

I have also investigated the two popular movements through the analysis of the models of conflict which were structured, at the level of civil society, by the social-movement component in the collective action of artisans and industrial workers respectively. The difference between the nature of the conflicts to emerge depends, firstly, on the content of the principles of *identity*, *opposition* and *totality* which the social movement articulates; secondly, it turns upon the relative position that labour action assumes in the context of each popular movement, considered as a whole. The collective action of industrial workers and the social conflict which class action structured, acquired a greater centrality in the popular movement emerging from the 1880s. By contrast, in the Chartist wave of protest, it was the language of political Radicalism that integrated, within the same movement, the action of very different popular strata and also succeeded in spanning the poles of respectability and roughness within popular culture. On the contrary, if we consider urban mobilisations in the early 1890s or during the First World War, we can see that popular strata articulated a discourse of class, namely they made reference to at least one principle of the model of conflict which was structured by labour action.

The construction of popular movements in Britain, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, thus entailed, on the one hand, the articulation of critical discourses and the creation of independent organisations by popular strata. On the other hand, it involved the integration of the different poles of popular culture. E.P. Thompson identifies the emergence, within the plebeian culture of the early

nineteenth century, of a respectable pole, constituted by the confluence of the Dissenting and Jacobin traditions within the work ethic of the artisans. In Chartism the popular strata oriented towards *both* respectability and roughness were integrated around the Radical critique of political power. Such a process could not have occurred on the basis of the identity of trade asserted by the artisans, since one crucial yet divisive mainspring of their action was the defence of labour markets from the competition of the unskilled. The decline of the social-movement component in artisans' action, in the decades after 1850, coincided with the loss of critical edge in the discourse of popular strata. The two poles of popular culture split as well, whilst popular strata were either prevalently unorganised or constituted minor elements of support for the traditional parties. From the late 1880s, the emergence of a new model of work conflict brought about two major changes. On the one hand, there were growing processes of ideational and organisational autonomy in the action of popular strata, which coincided with their growing self-organisation. On the other hand, this enabled further dynamics of integration to take place: between skilled and unskilled, between urban popular strata and trade unions at the political level, and between respectable working men, unwaged women and the disorderly poor.

The development of the new popular movement also combined, within the same collective action, the feelings of solidarity in workplaces and neighbourhood communities, with the rational pursuit of material interests. Moreover, the action of the movement made reference to "ultimate ends" and also took into account its "foreseeable results". The achievement of such integration can be seen in the collective action of the miners in South Wales. They did not refuse the

institutionalisation of their action such that workers' interests could be satisfied, but at the same time they upheld and emphasised the non-negotiable character of their struggle, which was sustained by their critical discourse and independent organisation. For this reason the experience of South Wales miners has been given a central place in the analysis of the popular movement which, in the early decades of the twentieth century, consolidated its prominence within British public debate. Around the model of social conflict that the miners structured, they were able both to preserve the autonomy of their action and to achieve, in South Wales, the integration of popular strata in the movement, with further consequences in terms of political change.

The different standpoints that were articulated in the movement's debate have been reconstructed through analysing their specific position in relation to the principles of identity, opposition and totality, which defined the model of class conflict. The simultaneous reference to transcending the social order and to material interests, which were contained in labour action and in the discourse of the popular movement, also allows the analysis to locate phenomena such as the formation of political sects or bureaucratic trade unions. The strategy that Blatchford proposed for the ILP or the Socialist Labour Party in Scotland, on the one hand, and the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners, on the other, have been taken as examples of sectarianism and bureaucratisation, respectively. In the case of the sect, its discourse contained a strong reference to the autonomy of the movement, which was linked to the tendency towards negating and transcending the social order. However, the more the purity of the creed was reasserted, the more the distance grew between action and material

interests, and the more difficult the construction of an integrated movement became. In the case of the bureaucratic trade union, the reference to interests, in the context of a discourse which was not critical of social domination, was consistent with an organisational form where the selection of leaders followed criteria of professional competence, in the absence of any reference to conflict. The integration of the cotton spinners themselves could be achieved, but the co-ordination with the workers of other sectors was not pursued; and the lack of autonomy in the spinners' discourse can be seen in the ease with which their leaders became officials of their opponents' organisations.

In this study, the centrality of the model of social conflict has been given analytical primacy. This is based on the assumption that collective action emerges, within civil society, in the context of relations of domination and with reference to interests. Therefore I have paid attention to the dynamics at the level of the labour process, especially to the differing degrees of workers' autonomy in the organisation of work and to the initiatives for change by entrepreneurs and managers. The research has shown that the capacity to link the conflict for the control of work organisation with alternative projects for re-organising society as a whole, was at its strongest among those workers who possess a relatively higher degree of control over their own working activity. Hence, these workers could conceive of a perspective, for their collective action, which aimed at the absolute control of workplaces. Contrary to the Marxist tradition, which explains labour antagonism with arguments about exploitation and deprivation, resistance was strongest and action was deepest, so to speak, in those sectors and jobs where workers attach cultural value to work.

The theoretical approaches of Tilly and Pizzorno have been criticised on the basis of this analytical centrality which is granted to civil society and to the reality of its relations of domination. Tilly scrutinises the position of popular strata in relation to the political system, in order to explain the emergence of social movements. Pizzorno eschews reference to social domination and equates social movements with discontinuous waves of protest. Hence, the rational pursuit of interests and the emotional expression of solidarity alternate in time and cannot coexist, while the reference to the immanence of particular interests, which is contained in labour action, rules out labour's recourse to a universalistic and critical discourse.

The special interest that a study of the labour movement in the Britain of the early twentieth century raises for the theory of social movements, resides in the actual centrality that the conflict against opponents located in civil society takes within the action of the popular movement. When discussing the model of conflict that the artisans had structured in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it was noted that their critical discourse was cast in moral terms. The critique that the craftsmen directed against their social opponents, drew a distinction between the masters oriented towards the market, and those who followed the ethical customs of the trade. On the contrary, the workers who were closest to the model of class conflict, such as the engineers on the Clyde and the miners in South Wales, criticised managers and employers because of their social position in the control of work organisation and direction of investments. Their critique was also ethical, since they counterposed the domination of the industrialists with workers' solidarity, but it did not distinguish between good and bad capitalists. At the same

time, however, workers and industrialists shared a common orientation towards scientific progress and the rationalisation of the work process. Thus, the model of class conflict also paved the way for Bevin's proposal for institutionalising work conflict, to be achieved through the co-determination by trade unions and progressive industrialists of both work organisation and the direction of economic development.

Compared with the labour movements on the Continent, the centrality of struggle and negotiation at the level of *civil society* stands out in the British experience. The economic development which coincided with the growth of industry was led by private agents and not by agencies of the state. The autonomy of collective bargaining was defended by the mid-Victorian unionism of skilled workers. Then, with the emergence of the new popular movement, leaders as diverse in other respects as Tom Mann and Ernest Bevin, asserted the leadership of the workers' organisations in civil society over the political wing of the movement. This marks a difference with the other large European countries such as Germany, France and Italy, where the wider involvement of the state in the process of industrialisation coincided with the pre-eminence of the political party within the labour movement. This renders the study of the British popular movement in the early mid-twentieth century particularly suitable for an investigation of the relationship between the construction of social conflicts and more general processes of self-organisation, the generation of critical discourse and the creation of new institutions by popular strata.

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